

RISING SUNS

When he left his shanty town home in the West Indies, Suns Alpy *knew* that if only he could get to England he would be able to 'sell the goods'—and that no man living would be able to stop him. The 'goods' in his case were a combination of talents which should have been a surefire bet for a Bright Young Man in a modern success story. But as a West Indian with no strings to pull, the prospect of his being able to use his talents seemed extremely remote.

This was before he met Jack Borrowdell, a high-powered Market and Industrial Research specialist who, impressed by Suns' magnetic charm and fantastic memory, gave him the break that happens to a friendless Negro only once in a million cases. To Researchers United Ltd., Suns was a godsend—he was just what they needed to investigate market potential among the coloured communities in Britain. To Laura, John's very beautiful and gifted wife, Suns was an enigma—and a test of liberal ideas about coloured people. After all, she had never been in love with one before.

In this fast moving novel of depth and integrity John Gloag has successfully shown how the pressures of Big Business operated upon the carefree, happy-go-lucky Suns Alpy who came to England, and changed him into a ruthless business executive who was convinced that he could manipulate everything—and everyone.

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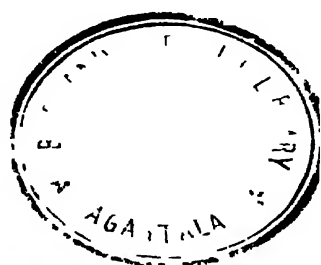
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Rising Suns

JOHN GLOAG



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**The people, the business organizations,
the island, and some of the other places,
are imaginary.**

DEPARTURE

ONE

The banana freighter, *Wenvoe*, had entered a land-locked harbour in the cool early hours when the passengers were still asleep. The Captain, in a dressing gown and a foul temper, stood on the port side of the bridge to superintend as Mr Crum, the First Officer who did all the responsible work, brought the ship alongside the quay. There had been a cocktail party the night before to welcome the new passengers who had come aboard at Jamesport, and to cheer up the elderly or less affluent passengers who preferred the limited comforts of the ship to three nights ashore in super-luxury hotels in the mountains or on the north coast; but the party had gone on too long and the Captain had a stupendous hangover. He detested passengers and could only be plausibly civil to them when he was high. Soon they'd be up and getting in the way, irritating the local labour force with their goggling, their idiotic comments, their obvious idleness. Forty-three of these assorted bastards were cluttering up the ship, complaining about the food, the service, and the ill-designed, inconvenient cabins. When the party ashore returned there would be over eighty. They were only there to keep down overheads; the banana was the real first class passenger, given the best accommodation and coddled with loving care. Pity he'd ever been promoted to command the largest of the Company's fleet. A red hot wire of irritability ran through his life and gave him a permanent scowl. Heavy eyebrows, like thatched eaves, shadowed his close-set, smouldering brown eyes. He was a black-haired Welshman, a Morgan from the Taff Vale, christened Henry, which usually inspired professional funny-men to make cracks about buccaneers, six foot two of

muscle and fat, with the fat winning, and the unhappy air of a neolithic savage unused to wearing clothes.

He growled a running commentary on the proceedings as the ship, gently nosed into position by a tug, was moored. With a rattle that woke every passenger in the port cabins the long gangway was lowered to the wharf, but three hours passed before any passengers descended the wobbling, slippery metal steps.

'There's not much at San Jago,' the Purser had told them.

There wasn't. A quay, a few pale yellow buildings with corrugated iron roofs the colour of dried blood. A well-made road that ended at the group of long sheds beside the quay: some railway sidings with a few brown box cars on one of the tracks and an antique rusty engine fussing about and leaking steam: a line of ash-grey telegraph poles, all crooked, the sagging wires above them webbed with the olive-green whiskers of some parasitic growth: a strip of grubby sand littered with scraps of paper, cans, driftwood, rags, and the skeleton of a small dog picked clean by vultures. One of those scavengers glided slowly overhead, its huge wings outspread, like two folds of a canework and feather screen in the worst Victorian taste. No sign of a town or any habitation apart from one-storeyed office buildings and a canteen. Half a square mile of untidy desolation, enclosed by a crescent of low hills, where palms grew with the density of a jungle. The road, following the curve of the coast, led to those hills. Big lorries rolled along it every quarter of an hour, piled high with bunches of bananas on the stalk, each cluster enveloped by a big plastic bag with the green fruit glinting through. The lorries drew up in the shadow of the sheds to be unloaded by a score of chattering Negro women and three or four men, one glistening bag balanced on each dark head, to be stacked in the sheds till the cool of the evening, when the loading ports, low down in the ship's hull, would be opened.

The turquoise sea had the brash vulgarity of an old-fashioned

hand-coloured picture postcard. The sun blazed. Even the slowest movement invited the sweaty embrace of humid, tropical heat.

Aft, on the open part of the *Wenvoe's* meagre promenade deck, a green and white striped awning was stretched; the canvas had been hosed before the passengers came up from breakfast, and the scalloped valance still dripped intermittently. One of those drops of moisture fell on the immaculate pale blue shirt of a port policeman who had come aboard and was displaying his dignity and smart uniform to a listless audience. He examined the dark spot on his short sleeve, then glanced up sharply at two women who were leaning over the rail, looking at the wharf below which was just coming to life.

'You throw something at me?' he demanded, angrily.

The English woman said: 'Of course not—we've got nothing to throw.'

Her American companion said: 'I would if I had,' but she spoke in an undertone. Fortunately the policeman didn't hear. He was furious: that spot insulted his dignity. He looked at it again, but the heat had already dried it without leaving a stain. 'Spitting at folks,' he muttered, and strode along the main deck. They'd be shown some day, those high-ups—yeah, for sure, when the island was on its own.

'Oh, Christ, it's started already,' said the Second Officer, who'd seen the incident. Passengers were just plain hell. Things always went sour when they were about. He overtook the policeman. 'Look, Joe,' he said; 'that dripped off the awning. I got one on my napper, too. I felt it.'

'O.K., Mr Sant, if you say so.'

'I do say so. You know me, Joe.'

'Sure I do. And, Mr Sant, you shouldn't be around without a titfer—not after sun-up.'

'No sun gets through my sort of hair.'

The policeman grinned, all dignity dissolved. Mr Sant, who

had fiery red hair, grinned back. 'And don't ask me if they've been told about cameras, because they have,' he said.

The policeman nodded. The loading teams, mostly women, who'd be coming down all day, hated being photographed, because they worked in their oldest clothes. Work had been stopped once, because some tourists had snapped a group of the girls, and not a load was shifted till the spool of film had been chucked into the harbour.

'Yes, I'd throw a whole lot of things,' the American woman continued, 'including a reminder that niggers haven't ever built anything that can stand up in the way of a business or a government. Look at Haiti and Liberia, and all the picayune Hitlers in those new African states of yours——'

'They're not ours, Mavis,' the English woman interjected. 'They're independent.'

'They're in your Commonwealth set-up. But I guess we've quit, as a race, and you British began it.'

The other woman sighed. 'Look, Mavis,' she said, 'I do wish you wouldn't talk like that. You don't really mean it, do you? You're much too good a person.'

'What's being good got to do with it? Certainly I mean it. But you'll find out, Janet. You're facing a big colour problem of your own. It's on your doorstep right now—knocking at the door. Look at that ape of a cop—he's the kind that wants "in", and there's another of 'em down there.' She pointed at a tall, well-built, smiling young man, in a pale grey suit, a dazzling white shirt, and a scarlet tie, who had strolled along the wharf with a slender girl wearing a bright blue blouse and a white skirt. They were regarding the ship appraisingly. 'That's the type,' Mavis went on. 'Educated beyond their opportunities and as miserable as all hell because of it.' Which hardly applied to the couple on the wharf, who looked particularly pleased with life and themselves.

'Thar she is, Julie,' the man was saying.

'And you'se going on her, Suns?' The girl sounded incredulous.

'Sure, sure.'

'And you'll send for me? Oh, Suns, why can't I come along with you?'

'Cos you ain't a man, that's why. See, now, Julie, we've had all this out. *I* make the passage, easy. Two men O.K. perhaps. But a girl—no.'

She sighed. 'You got plenty money for two,' she protested.

'And I'm not wasting it even on one. I got it all planned. As I tole you. And you know nothing, see?'

'You certain Smokey can fix it?'

'What you know 'bout Smokey, honey? You supposed to know nothing.'

'You've been a good friend to Smokey, Suns. I just hope he remembers, that's all.'

'Sure he does. I tell you, I got it all planned.' He repeated the word 'planned'. He liked the sound of it. A boss word. All the top folks always said they had a plan for this and a plan for that—like in England. And he was going there to see, and by this time tomorrow he'd be on his way, for Smokey would be on shore and he, Suns Alpy, would take his place on this swell ship. And then—he'd get inside England easy. (The anti-colour immigration act was still years ahead.)

'Now, Julie, you just forget it all,' he went on. 'We both come down tonight. Now we got the day.'

'Yes, Suns, but not the night.'

'No, honey, but we got plenty time, and I'll sure be kind.'

'You'se always kind, Suns. You got kind hands. I loves your hands.'

He glanced at his right hand, with its long, muscular fingers. Funny, how every chick he'd ever had went big for his hands. Maybe the English chicks would, too. Julie seemed to be in on that thought.

'You won't tangle with no white girls, will you, Suns?' There was a quaver in her voice.

'Me? White girls? Why, Julie, I reckon they look only half-cooked.'

'How you know they look half-cooked?'

'Got eyes, honey. And they know it, too: or why they spend all that time getting sun-dark on the beaches, all mussed up with oil, like they was cooking themselves? You tell me that.'

'They both rocked with laughter.

TWO

'What do those two want?' Mavis asked, looking at the laughing couple below; 'don't tell me they're going to hump bananas—not in those clothes, they aren't.'

'Perhaps they're just sightseers, like us,' Janet suggested.

Mavis didn't bother to reply. She'd run up against this sort of dumb stuff with the British before, and couldn't get past it: maybe it was their brand of humour, though she sometimes thought, a little uneasily, that she was being taken for a ride. She also suspected, now and then, quite wrongly and unjustly, that there was an element of slyness in Janet's gentle tolerance and kindness. She could have quarrelled with her dozens of times, but Janet wouldn't play; she was the non-quarrelling type. You might as well try to box with a jellyfish. And after a very short time—a matter of weeks—Mavis had acquired something far more than a superficial liking for her; it was genuine affection, oddly mingled with a never-to-be-admitted feeling of awe, for Janet was the widow of that notable egghead, the late Sir John Corbel, whose books on economics and social history had indirectly helped the Labour Party to power, and he'd been tossed a knighthood when they were in office. So even if her husband had been a socialist crack-pot, she was *Lady Janet Corbel*. That amounted to something; but how little it amounted to with Janet, Mavis would never have understood.

Both women were in their early fifties. Mavis Semple, elegant, well-groomed, and as hard-faced as the commander-in-chief of a husband and four sons should be. A Franklin from Virginia, with dark blue eyes, once sultry, but now ill-tempered. Her husband, a large, clumsy colourless man, not unlike a dusty

old white elephant, was the former president of Crowdie, Semple and Comstock Inc., of Madison Avenue, better known as C. S. & C. A heart condition had forced him to retire at sixty, but it didn't absolve him from domestic service—he had to fetch and carry all the odds and ends Mavis wanted at ten-minute intervals during the day. Marshall Kane Semple was a New Englander whose moral fibre had been softened by commercial success and most of his will-power nullified by Mavis. They were travelling to England on the *Wenvoe* after eight weeks on the island, because sea passages were overbooked, and this was the best they could get. Marshall had been forbidden long-distance flights. Their sons ranged in age from twenty-three to twelve, with twins of nineteen in between.

Janet Corbel pitied Marshall, who was far too old for his age. His mind, emptied of business affairs, had little left in it, for he had been a dedicated advertising man, with only one recreation, but he had written off sex since his coronary, though he couldn't write off Mavis. Once she had young brains, brilliant with misunderstanding; now, a rich man's boss, she had an emotional investment in prejudices. She talked about her sons and their vigorous health with possessive enthusiasm. Something about 'health without effort' came into the picture somewhere, and Janet had suspected Christian Science, but it was only an old slogan for a laxative advertised by C. S. & C. that had stayed with Mavis. Nothing seemed to go wrong with those paragons, so Janet was spared the medical details about operations that, like scarlet threads, so often brighten the dull neutralities of American family life. Mavis was also abnormally reticent about her confinements; possibly because she had produced children as easily as squeezing toothpaste from a tube. Janet, who was childless, envied her, and was fascinated by the mixture of glittering sophistication and immature innocence. There were times when Mavis talked and apparently thought like a girl of ten; such a very pleasant little girl that it was difficult not to

grow fond of her. In Janet, Mavis discovered the ideal listener: sincerely interested, encouraging fresh confidences with the right questions, always asked at the right moment, and consistently attentive.

Marshall seldom mentioned his family, though he knew far more about his eldest son and the twins than their mother. The eldest, Marshall Kane Semple junior, with Yale behind him, was training for a career in advertising, collecting hard field experience by peddling detergents in tough Middle West territory: an intent, optimistic woman chaser, as befits a budding salesman. The twins, Elmer and Stephen, were identical, but not in character. Elmer, a born go-getter: as earnest as a college football coach and about as interesting. Stephen: considerate, warm-hearted, and within measurable distance of a shot-gun wedding. Charm can get out of hand. Pop knew all this, and was all set to wear either the wedding or the costs of an abortion—which-ever seemed the easiest way out. When the news broke, he'd have a convenient heart attack, and leave it all to Mom. He derived a vicarious satisfaction from the sexual capers of Marshall and Stephen. Elmer was different. He was uneasy about Elmer and his resemblance to the end product of a dedicated business career. As for the youngest—Everett at twelve was impossible. He'd been an afterthought, generated by a transitory interest in family planning, following a succulent hash of eugenics and economics served up by Mavis to the married staff of C. S. & C. in a course of six lectures after office hours. (As no increase in the staff birthrate followed, she felt obliged to set an example.) If Everett had been born the wrong side of the tracks he would, by now, be well advanced in juvenile delinquency.

'We're a nice family,' Pop used to say; and when they weren't around, he almost believed it. Mavis used superlatives. She was still comfortably ignorant, and Pop hoped she'd stay that way a little longer.

Janet respected her loyal and innocent beliefs. 'This'll kill

you,' was her favourite opening for any anecdote about the quaint precocity of her youngest son.

Then there was the material as well as the human side.

The good listener heard much about the luxurious amplitude of their country house in Connecticut, above Essex on the Connecticut River, with the private yacht basin, the acres of woodland, the trouble with architects and decorators, the recurrent problem of servants, even more exasperating when they used their apartment on Central Park South. The Semples lived in a world so different from Janet's that it seemed like an over-written fairy tale. By their standards, she was on the bread-line. Her needs were few and simple, her income small, supplemented by unpredictable royalties from some of her husband's books that continued to sell. But she was comfortable and looked comfortable, though her hazel eyes were always opened rather widely, as though she lived in a state of incredulous surprise; perhaps she did, for she liked people—all sorts and conditions of people—and many of them did such astonishing things. She had never been slim, sturdy rather, always in hard condition, and a little weather-beaten from an open-air life with a lot of gardening in it. Her small Georgian house in Warwickshire had five acres of ground, and she hadn't much help in coping with the garden.

THREE

Janet had saved up her fare to the island by stringent economies, spread over three years, so she could at last accept the long-standing invitation of her old friend, Angela Brede, wife of His Excellency Sir Udimore Brede, K.C.M.G., the Governor. She had looked forward to being with Angela, and Udy, as his wife called him, was a dear, only a slightly-starved survival of the days when Britain had an Empire, and a Colonial governor was expected to look and act like a Roman proconsul. Sir Udimore certainly looked the part: he had impressive classical features, a taut, athletic frame, and the ability to wear clothes with an elegant reticence that suggested Savile Row, though the tailor's tabs were less exalted, for he was a stock size and bought everything off the peg. He was a little saddened by the knowledge that he would be the last governor of the island, that he represented a way of life and training that was passing from the world, but he had no patience with people who wanted to put back the clock, although he suspected that chaos probably lay ahead. Meanwhile, he had to make things easy and familiar for the men who might one day take over from him, though he didn't altogether trust them. They were nearly all politicians, even sillier than the home-grown variety.

Janet found the atmosphere of Government House oppressive. Everybody there seemed to be putting on an act. Angela, formerly vivacious and amusing, was always on official duty; the vivacity was brittle; even when they were alone together—which was seldom—the Governor's wife never relaxed. And she used to be such fun, thought Janet, who felt increasingly guilty when she found herself counting the days and the parties that

had still to be endured; but she was a conscientious guest, resolved to 'sing for her supper', and the Bredes, like good hosts, left her alone, and made no attempt to organize her time. But the parties were an obligation, and she disliked them. The Army men and officials, all on the 'old boy' wave-length, had a slightly conspiratorial air; even with a glass in their hands they seemed to be plotting the next sip, glancing round furtively before they made some innocuous remark about cricket. It had to be cricket. There wasn't anything about the weather to give momentum to small talk. As a subject it didn't exist. The women, when they weren't too blatantly sucking up to Angela, exchanged felinities about absent friends. The non-stop chatter was stimulated by trays of cocktails, carried from group to group by tall, smiling Negroes, elegant in short white jackets, sky-blue cummerbunds, and black trousers.

Foreign guests were a welcome relief, and there were usually a few friendly Americans. Mavis had latched on to Janet at one of those parties, and thereafter she saw the Semples several times, and spent many hours lazing on their private beach.

She managed to see a lot of the island on her own, for Angela lent her a Morris Minor, and as she'd driven one at home for years, she could explore the strange, serpentine roads without having to learn the tricks of an unfamiliar make. What she saw nourished a growing dismay. Of course, in that climate everybody could and did live outdoors most of the time; but even so, she was appalled by the scruffy little villages of wooden shacks, some raised on stilts so that the ground floor was completely open, painted when first built and never since, without proper sanitation or water supply, or anything approaching decent privacy; and the shanty towns with their crazy huts of discarded corrugated iron, petrol tins, bits of car bodies, and odds and ends of building refuse, were even worse than the villages. Segregated from all this squalor were the super-luxury houses, hotels and restaurants, and other trimmings of the rich man's

playground. ('How John would have hated all this,' was a thought that made her feel vaguely guilty: not that John had liked austerity, far from it, but he had detested poverty as a beastly by-product of social injustice.) Those large white or pale-coloured houses, stretched out on the hillsides like drowsing animals, were owned or rented by people wholly detached from the native life of the island—wealthy exiles avoiding British taxation, or Americans on vacation, moving from drink to drink and party to party with the slightly hunted air of trying to escape from something. The big landlords, no longer planters but cattle owners, lived well away from the tourist belt, mostly in gracious eighteenth-century houses; while the managers and administrative staff of the banana and sugar plantations lived on the job—home and office housed in one commodious modern building. But the people of the island were outside—always. Even Government House was just another monument to the traditional detachment of the rulers: a Victorian classic building, brilliant with white paint, spick and span and slightly coarse, like a tart in an over-pleated white skirt and a frilly blouse.

'I'm the wrong sort of person for this sort of life,' Janet told herself. Even the tropic vegetation looked dilapidated, for there were no seasons, no annual shedding of leaves: the old foliage died and stayed on the trees. What looked like grass verges and lawns were masses of close-growing little plants, spiky and weed-like. Contrast everywhere: blazing blossoms, bougainvillea swilling over walls, crotons of every hue, the red hands of poinsettia, the open-petalled rose-like hibiscus, and—the works of man: old cars, stripped of wheels, bodies, and engines, dumped by the roadside, every variety of garbage, and the outer husks of all the packaged goods of Britain and America.

The island discouraged Janet. She wanted to meet the real people of the place, and talk to them, find out what made them tick and made them so obviously happy. But they always

thought she was just another American tourist, and when she protested, 'But I'm British, like you,' there was no response. Except once.

And now, gazing down at the wharf where the two young Negroes still stood, arm in arm, she remembered the occasion, and the man.

FOUR

She had been visiting a factory where sugar was processed and rum distilled. 'Must see a sugar mill,' the Governor's A.D.C. had told her; 'nobody'll believe you've been here unless you do. I'll lay it on.' And the smooth, efficient Major Mortimore Sprakes had laid it on, and offered to have her driven out to Vega; but she preferred to drive herself. Vega, the Major told her, was Spanish for 'fruitful plain', and the road to it wriggled through the agricultural heart of the island, mile after mile of sugar cane plantations, banana and coconut palms, with the vivid red-brown scars of bauxite workings slashed here and there, and cars streaming both ways, hooting continuously at the blind turns. The village of Vega was a straggling tropical slum, with only one sound building set well apart from the shacks, the two-storeyed office block which cast a broad patch of shadow where Janet parked the Morris. She was received as a V.I.P. by Mr Franchet, the manager, a lean, middle-aged man, just a bit too effusive. His surviving hair was long, draped over and plastered down to hide his baldness; and Janet always suspected men who did that—of what, she would have found it difficult to say.

She drank coffee, and listened to his account of local labour troubles. 'Heaven knows what it'll be like after they get independence,' he said. That seemed to be the theme song of everyone in authority.

'Perhaps it won't be as bad as you think,' she suggested mildly.

'I shan't be here to see,' he returned. 'Oh, no, Lady Corbel. I'm not wearing that sort of upside-down caper: I'm due to

retire in two years.' Suddenly he became brisk, and said: 'Well, you didn't come here to listen to my problems. I'll take you across and hand you over to a guide, and then I'll say good-bye, for I have to be at the upper plantation in half an hour.'

Mr Franchet's office was air-conditioned, and after that the short walk to the factory seemed like a journey through a furnace, but almost cool compared with the inside of the mill, where the cane was chewed up by a revolving spiked shaft, washed, subjected to intense heat, and reduced to simmering sludge. The place was stifling, murky, filthy, and so crazily ramshackle that Janet was reminded of a Heath Robinson drawing. The plant was pervaded by a heady, sweet smell, almost overpowering when at last she reached the rum distillery, where the tour ended. She had climbed scores of steep wooden stairs, edged her way along narrow gangways, grasping grubby handrails so that her hands were almost as black as her guide's. When he saw her looking at them in dismay, he grinned, poured some colourless liquid over them, and the dirt melted away. 'Don't taste it,' he warned: not that she wanted to. 'It's unmatured rum—you'd be right out if you even licked a finger.'

She tipped the guide who walked back with her to the office, where a pleasant young man in a short-sleeved white shirt and light grey trousers welcomed her. 'Come in,' he invited, 'just rest for a few minutes and cool off.'

Janet thanked him. 'I've moved your car out of the sun,' he said. 'You left the keys in.'

'But it was shady where I left it,' said Janet.

'Shade shifts pretty smart here,' she was told, 'and you've been an hour or more in the mill.'

She was puzzled. She knew perfectly well that the pool of shadow couldn't have shrunk so quickly. He switched on a high-powered smile.

'Enjoy your trip?' he asked.

'Very interesting,' she answered inadequately, still wondering why anybody consented to work in such conditions.

'Yeah—but way behind what you've got back in the States, I guess.'

'I don't know. I've never been to America. I'm British—like you.'

The smile became almost blinding. 'You from England?' His deep voice had a note of reverence.

'Yes—I live there.'

'In London?'

'No, in Warwickshire.'

'Near Stratford—Shakespeare's Stratford?'

'Just over twelve miles away.'

'First place I make for after London. I've seen swell pictures of it.'

'So you're going to England. Do you want to live there?'

'Yeah—nothing here for me. Everything in England.'⁴

'I'm not so sure. You won't like the climate—not after this island.'

She stopped herself from saying that he mightn't like the people either. She paused, then added: 'But you have a good job here, haven't you?'

'The best I could get, and not good enough, not for me, it isn't. I can do better in England.'

She didn't disillusion him. He was obviously well educated, but he'd be lucky to get a job as a bus driver or conductor, a railway porter, a factory hand—even if the unions let him work at all except as an unskilled labourer. She sighed. That was something her John had never foreseen: unions putting up a colour bar. His work had dealt with history and economic theory; not with the raw hostilities of life. So she said nothing and listened as the young man continued.

'I'm not staying put,' he said; 'there's nothing for me nor any of us here.'

'Not when you have independence?'

'That's way, way off.'

'Five or six years at the most.'

'More like ten—then I'll be too old.'

He knew what Janet's smile meant, and said: 'I'm twenty-two. Unless I'm well on my way by twenty-five, where'll I be? At thirty I *shall* be too old. Then I'd have to take anything—*anything*, instead of picking what I want.'

Something in his voice checked Janet's doubts. This wasn't a run of the mill angry young man, spurning his bread and butter, and wanting everything handed to him on a plate. His large dark eyes had something she'd seen only once before, something that glowed in the brown eyes of an American evangelist whose preaching had drawn huge audiences, even in the unresponsive, hard-headed English midlands. She recalled John's comment when they left the big stadium near Birmingham where a service of repentance had been held. 'Quite a performance,' he'd said with a chuckle. 'Those eyes and that voice could sell anything to nearly everybody—once. I suspect Welsh ancestry, and something negroid further back—there's a Negro strain in so many Americans. I was almost expecting to hear tom-toms.' And he was right. The hymn that began and ended the service, 'March through the World with Jesus', had throbbed with West African undertones.

She jerked her mind back to this eager, earnest youngster.

'What *do* you want?' she asked.

'Money,' he answered without hesitation, 'and big money. Then I can buy time—and lots of other things.'

'Such as?'

'Doesn't buying time cover most everything?'

'You can't buy everything,' she told him flatly, then regretted the words. They sounded so deflating. But he smiled and came back at her with: 'They all say that, when they've got the money.'



That was a bit too cheap. Janet rose. 'I must be going,' she said; 'I'm sorry Mr Franchet isn't here: I should have liked to thank him for having me taken round.'

'You're welcome. Now I'll show you where I've put your car.'

Back into the oven. The Morris had been moved a few feet nearer the office. Wheel marks in the dust showed that her original parking place was still in shadow.

He opened the car door.

'Look,' said Janet, 'why did you shift the car? You knew it wasn't necessary.'

'Because I wanted a chance to talk with you,' he replied frankly. 'I'll need contacts when I get to England. My name's Alpy—Suns Alpy. I know you're Lady Corbel, for I answered the 'phcne when Major Sprakes called up yesterday from Government House.'

'Then of course you knew I wasn't an American.'

'Not till you said. We had a Lady McCowan here once, wife of Sir Robert McCowan—they had a house on Spaniard's Inlet—and *she* was from Chicago. I wasn't falling into that one again.'

'I see. Well, the very best of luck when you do come to England.'

'That's real kind of you, Lady Corbel,' he said.

She drove away with an indelible memory of that luminous smile and an uneasy feeling that she'd promised him something.

During her stay on the island she'd found difficulty in distinguishing one dark face from another—especially the young men. But there was no mistaking or forgetting this one. Suns Alpy was down there on the wharf with his girl.

She stepped back from the rail.

FIVE

Any moment Suns might see her and wave a greeting that would turn Mavis's thin eyebrows into question marks; an explanation would detonate another explosive argument, and it was far too hot for argument. Janet was oppressed by the steamy heat of the harbour. The air, trapped over the faintly rippling water by those grey-green, encircling hills, had the heavy enveloping stillness of a dense fog, as though no breeze had stirred it for centuries. 'I've been too pampered,' she thought, strolling over to the starboard side of the deck. Climate had been defeated by all those air-conditioned rooms at Government House, and the quiet, adroit, and apparently willing service had made life so relaxed and effortless for the Governor's guests—and so enervating. She was rather ashamed of having so many critical reservations about her stay in the island. How simple life was for people like Mavis who had everything they saw brought sharply into focus by their prejudices, so they knew what to think about everything; though their comfortable certitudes really meant that they didn't think about anything at all.

She had discovered Mavis's colour prejudices only the day before at Jamesport. 'The Semples had embarked there, so that Marshall could settle in comfortably and get used to the ship before the voyage to England began. Left to herself, Mavis would have stayed ashore till the last possible moment, and reached San Jago within minutes of the gangway being raised. But when Marshall wanted something badly enough he could always stage a heart attack, and as he now liked to do everything in slow time, after forty years of fighting the clock, he had made preparations to get his own way ten days before the sailing

date. So Mavis surrendered. She may have suspected that some of those heart attacks were rather too well timed; but she couldn't be sure, and was loyal to Marshall's infirmity. Janet had joined the ship at Jamesport because her hosts had flown to London for a conference, and she had no wish to stay on alone at Government House for a day longer than she had to: the mechanized courtesy and the small talk (God! how small it was) of the officials got her down. Although a rationalist, she couldn't help regretting that cricket had replaced religion.

The Governor's dove-grey Rolls delivered her to the *Wenvoe*; a car with silver crowns instead of numbers on the registration plates, driven by an urbane Negro in a grey uniform trimmed with purple—the only car permitted to enter the dock and drive alongside the ship. Everything else had to stop at the dock gates where porters waited to handle baggage, and everything else included the over-blown Cadillac hired by the Semples. Mavis had been virtually ordered to walk. No respect for the power and glory of the dollar here. She boiled over when she and Marshall, picking their way over the uneven concrete surface with their cortège of barrow-pushing porters, were passed by the Governor's car with Janet inside. The car drew up near the foot of the gangway. The chauffeur opened the door and smiled. Janet alighted and smiled. The dock policeman saluted and smiled. Then he held up pedestrian traffic as she walked to the gangway, and waved it on again as she began to mount the clanging, rickety metal steps. Then his smile faded as he was confronted by Mavis.

'Why's this car here when ours was stopped?' she snapped.

'No cars allowed on the dock, mam.'

'Isn't this a car?'

'The Governor's car, mam.'

'Well?'

'Yes, mam. Only the Governor's car allowed on the dock.'

'Say, do you know who we are?' Mavis was beginning, when

Marshall plucked feebly at her arm. She shook off his hand, but he was insistent. 'Listen, Mave,' he said: 'I don't feel so good—don't start anything. I gotta rest before I take those stairs.' He glanced up apprehensively at the gangway. It seemed as high and relentlessly steep as Jacob's ladder, depicted in a Sunday school book he'd had as a child, a ladder piercing some shining clouds with a discreetly hazy vision of a benign deity beyond. All those steps. He had been forbidden stairs. He sat down on a corner of a baggage trolley and took a Nitrocine tablet. Janet had reached the top, where a beaming Purser, all set to welcome the Governors' guest, had already doomed her to the Captain's table. Mr Sant, leaning over the bridge, heard the high, protesting voice of Mavis ascending from the wharf, speaking her mind about the British, their laws, police force, and disrespect for American citizens.

'Bloody bitch!' said Mr Sant.

This scene was re-enacted in reverse at San Jago, for Mavis had no intention of spending all day in that humid harbour, so she hired a car and insisted on Janet and Marshall coming with her to the hills that rose steeply by Spaniard's Inlet, twenty miles away. But the same rules applied; no car was allowed on the wharf, so they had to walk to where it was parked, beyond the sheds and offices. And Mr Sant said 'bloody bitch' again as the peevish voice of Mavis rose and fell and was finally drowned out by the laughter and chatter of the Negroes.

A mile out of San Jago their car passed a pale pink Ford Zodiac, with Suns at the wheel, and his girl beside him.

'There goes one of my contacts, Julie,' he said, as he recognized Janet, sitting in the back with Mavis. She looked incredulous, and he reassured her. 'I met up with her at Vega,' he continued; 'she's Lady Corbel—friend of the Governor's.'

'You never said.'

'No—I don't tell who I meet while they're still around; but I

guess she's on her way back. Maybe that'll be useful if there's trouble.'

'But if you're taking Smokey's place there won't be trouble, will there, Suns?'

'Can't say, honey, can't say. I just hope she's on that ship—that's all.' He glanced at Julie. 'And don't look like that. She—she could be my grandmother, easy.'

'Makes no difference,' said Julie; 'they all fall down flat for you.'

'An' that's just what you're going to do—we got time; plenty time before I change and get back.'

And presently they were making love in the private office of the small but prosperous car-hire business run by Smokey's father, Jock Fernand. 'Enjoy yourselves, children,' Jock had said; 'it's all yours. I got to thank you for handing Smokey back to me—eh, Suns, eh? He never listen to me, he listen to you. Eh? He'll be back tonight, and he's got it all fixed for you, an' I'll run you down come dark, and take Julie home. Julie, child, you sure look sweet this morning—Suns is a good-luck boy.'

Julie laughed. 'We're both that way,' she said; 'and thanks for lending us the swell car. We felt like a million dollars.'

'Pounds,' said Suns; 'pounds. We're British, like that fine contact of mine.'

'Yeah, but the Yanks got more dollars than the British got pounds,' said Fernand; 'you'se not in business, Suns.'

'Shall be, shall be,' Suns promised. He grinned. Julie's hand on his arm was urgent. 'I'll sure show you some loving, honey,' she murmured as they went into the private office and locked the door. And they were still intent and happy much later, when Jock knocked at the door and said they could eat when they liked. And later still they had a simple meal of fish and fruit and drank the coffee Julie brewed, enjoying their food far more than Janet enjoyed her expensive lunch with the Semples at Arroyo Español.

They sat on the terrace of that notable tourist trap, the Mountain Tavern, and just below them a spring gushed up, feeding a stream that looped and twisted through a water garden before plunging downhill to a freshwater pool above Spaniard's Inlet. The belt of pleasure beaches was spread out below them, a multi-hued panorama, with roads like white threads stitched through the green hillsides. Everywhere colour was exhaustingly insistent. Nearby two poui trees reared their vivid yellow blossom thirty feet above the water garden. Butterflies with orange wings flickered among the blaze of flowers. A tang of woodsmoke scented the air.

'Best planter's punch I've tasted yet,' said Marshall. A scattering of grated nutmeg had sharpened the flavour of the pineapple slice and the lime. 'What they gave us on the ship last night had everything left out but the ice. I'm going to have another: what about you, Janet?'

'Not another, Marshall,' said Mavis firmly. 'You know rum is out for you—you don't want another attack, do you?'

'Oh, God, are you going to start bickering again?' was Janet's unspoken question. They had bickered all the way to Arroyo Español. She decided to stick her neck out. 'I'd love another,' she said, 'but I won't drink alone.'

'You certainly won't,' said Marshall, snapping his fingers at a waiter and giving his order.

'You'll get no sympathy from me,' said Mavis.

The strength of the planter's punch asserted itself. 'I never do,' he returned.

'Marshall!'

'Yes, Mave.'

'Do you understand what you've just said?'

'Yes—every last word of it.' For a moment the President of C. S. & C. was speaking. He produced a cigar, and asked Janet if she minded.

'I like it,' she said.

'Don't trouble to ask me,' said Mavis, 'and may I remind you that it's your fourth since breakfast and that we're going to have lunch.'

'Cigars are O.K. by the specialists,' he said; 'cigarettes no—but then I've never used them. As for lunch—this'll last me through the next two or three rounds.'

'Marshall—I insist.' The waiter brought the drinks, and Mavis said: 'Is our lunch ready?'

'Jest when you are, mam.'

'Well, I guess I'm not,' said her husband, 'and shan't be for a piece. No. And don't look at me like that, Mave. I've just got around to facing up to something. Maybe I haven't much time left; so why shouldn't I live?'

'Why shouldn't you drink, you mean.'

'Yes—why not.' He sucked on the straws, lowering a good third of the liquor in the tall glass. 'And you'll just love being a widow.'

'I don't,' said Janet bluntly. The little girl in Mavis needed a well-smacked bottom now and then, and she was feeling exasperated. She hadn't wanted to go to Arroyo Español; she'd finished with the island, was sick and tired of it, and here it was intruding on her again, like a vulgar woman, plastered with make-up and flaunting clothes that were much too bright.

The lunch was in keeping with the exotic surroundings. Venison à la Creole—fresh venison, for deer were wild in this part of the island—wonderfully tender and served with a sauce that had genius among other ingredients, followed by tropical fruit salad, and coffee.

Marshall drank three glasses of iced beer with lunch, and said to hell with going down to the beaches, he could see all he wanted to see of Spaniard's Inlet from the terrace, and he'd just have a snooze. Anyway, they'd been there before, and once was plenty. So he was left at the Mountain Tavern, while Mavis

and Janet drove down to the sea and along the coast road for some thirty miles.

Mavis, obviously troubled, was silent, and Janet was drowsy. She dropped off to sleep, nor did she wake until after five o'clock when the car was ascending the hill to Arroyo Español. There they found Marshall, still on the terrace, giving earnest attention to a lizard like a miniature dinosaur. He looked very cheerful and, Janet thought, much younger.

Something's happened to him to make him look like that, she decided. Something had.

Directly Mavis was out of the way, he'd had a word with the proprietor of the Mountain Tavern—a worldly man of Spanish descent, prepared to cater for every need. He understood perfectly; it was, he observed, an unadvertised part of the service. So Marshall had found that he needn't have written off sex.

SIX

They stayed on to dine at the Mountain Tavern, only deserting the terrace when night followed the brief dusk, and a faint breeze cooled the air. A fire of aromatic logs cheered the dimly-lit lounge which adjoined the dining-room, and there they sat over coffee and brandy after dinner; Mavis bottling up a lot of ill-temper; Janet, uncomfortably aware that only her presence prevented it from being uncorked; while Marshall, happy and relaxed, was warmed by brandy and retrospective pride in his sexual renaissance. Janet was sleepy, but she made an effort to stay awake and keep some sort of conversation alive, feeling obliged, for her host's sake, to delay as long as possible the moment of return. At eleven o'clock Mavis said: 'The ship sails at six—or are we proposing to stay here indefinitely?'

Another brandy was Marshall's answer. Not for Janet. Certainly not for Mavis. Yes for Marshall—a big yes. The bartender on the *Wenwoe* was his excuse. That guy, he said, just sat on his ass, brushing off customers and chinning with the lounge stewards. No notion of service. He reckoned he'd lose out on service till they reached London, so he'd make the most of what was here. And brandy was good for his heart condition.

'You know perfectly well it isn't and that you're only allowed whisky. You should stay with that,' Mavis reminded him.

Certainly brandy inspired courage: he argued with his wife, amiably and inconclusively, and Janet realized that Mavis was not only furious but unable to cope with the situation. She relapsed into cold silence. Janet tried to make her talk, but she might have tried with more success to break ice with a tooth-pick.

Midnight was long past when they began their twenty mile drive back to San Jago. Late as it was, a few young people were still about in the wayside villages, headless figures, like Wells' *Invisible Man* when he tore off his bandages, for only the white and brightly coloured clothes of men and girls showed up in the distance, their dark faces and arms lost in the night until the headlights caught them. The harbour could be seen a long way off, sending a violet haze into the sky. Rolling clouds of pink steam, floodlit by the furnace of a locomotive, marked the slow passage of a train approaching the wharf. Soon they could see the white hull and upper works of the *Wenvoe* sharply defined, then everything was blacked out as the road curved downhill through a belt of palms to the harbour level and loading sheds.

Marshall slept soundly till the car stopped a little way from the sheds. Mavis tried to persuade the driver to take them on to the wharf, but he was firm. 'Not allowed, mam,' he said; 'an' they're loading up right now. I'd lose my licence, sure.' He had to raise his voice to make himself heard over the terrific din that came from the sheds in great waves of sound. Many voices were shouting something in chorus; angry voices, accompanied by the metallic rhythm of sticks whanged on tin cans and steel drums, a barbaric shindy super-charged with menace. When they alighted, the driver hesitated uneasily when Marshall wanted to pay him. Then he said: 'Please, sir, and ladies—get back in again.'

'Whatever for?' Mavis demanded.

'I think, maybe, some trouble,' he said. 'Let me drive you little way back—then I go and see.'

This seemed sensible to Janet, and she got in at once. Marshall and Mavis followed, and the driver turned the car and took them back up the road for half a mile. He got out. 'Better you stay here,' he advised. They watched him walk down the brilliant tunnel cut through the night by the headlights, his white-coated figure dwindling and then turning dark as he was

silhouetted against the violet glare that poured from the wharf.

Marshall fell asleep again. Mavis was querulous. 'Trouble,' she said; 'trouble, what *does* he mean?' Janet could imagine how easily trouble could be triggered off with proud and sensitive people like that port policeman who'd been only too ready to suspect that she'd spat at him, a suspicion so absurd that the whole incident seemed incredible—until you remembered that Negroes were expecting and looking for insults from whites: they'd had enough of them in the past. As happy and as sensitive as children, they were five generations at the most away from slavery, seven or eight from savagery. Trouble—of course there could be trouble.

There was, and it was still out of hand.

At dusk the opening of the *Wenvoe's* loading ports, just above the level of the wharf, was followed by nearly an hour of fantastic confusion while the dock hands tried to adjust the gangways, chattering, laughing, singing snatches of songs, and getting in each other's way, till at last the four gangways were run in and secured, giving two-way traffic at each port. All activity fell into an orderly pattern. Loading began, the bananas carried on the heads of men and girls, who paused before mounting the gangway to pull a string dangling from a little square box which rang a bell and alerted the tally clerks stationed at the foot, who handed every carrier a metal tally as they passed.

This went on for hours, a masterpiece of unconscious choreography, the banana ballet. Most of the passengers preferred to watch it from the decks. A few descended to the wharf where some enterprising and sprightly old women were doing a brisk trade in fruit, straw baskets, hats, and dolls. Mr Sant, mellow from a cocktail party on the after deck but keeping an eye on everything without letting anybody know it, was answering questions.

An elderly man from Sheffield had been critical of the loading

methods. 'Don't wonder the Yanks get ahead of us,' he growled. 'What a waste of man-power. Haven't they heard of conveyor belts?'

'They know all about them,' Mr Sant told him; 'and they know all about strikes. They could slice costs and get twice the load aboard in half the time if they were allowed to install machines.'

'Allowed?' said the Sheffield man.

'Just that—they're not allowed. Oh, they tried it once. And the plantation hands came out, and the lorry drivers too: even the railway men were all set to chip in. These men and women—particularly the women, and they're ninety per cent of that crowd down there—rely on their pennies from this job for a bit of extra on the side. They cash their tallies for tuppence a time—threepence after midnight. Make two hundred and forty trips with a load, and you're two quid up; and many of them make far more trips than that. They're tough—specially the older ones. But apart from the cash, they like the fun and the company—it's a party, and they're paid for going to it.'

He watched the wharf attentively. Quite a lot of non-workers were there now. Passengers who had gone ashore at Jamesport had been asked to embark before midnight, and the first contingent had arrived. For the next couple of hours they came aboard, and some of them, after a visit to the bar, went down to the market on the wharf. Mr Sant wished they wouldn't. He wished the Company would crack down on permission to hold that market: after all, they owned the wharf, and it was to their interest to avoid trouble and delay in loading, and the presence of idle people gaping at others who were working was asking for trouble. Captain Morgan had gone to bed, so had Mr Crum; both had to be up at five, an hour before the ship was due to sail, so Mr Sant was in charge, and hoped that everything and everybody would stay happy—especially the workers.

He was disappointed.

Presently he joined the Purser who stood at the head of the gangway, giving dutiful smiles to passengers who gingerly negotiated its shifting, clattering steps. A gross, unwieldy American woman had just descended, followed by a thin, wizened, bored-looking man who had, years ago, learned to ignore her.

'If a horse had a shape like that, they'd shoot it,' murmured the Purser.

'Looks like a whitewashed chimp,' said Mr Sant. 'I wonder she wasn't sent up from Cape Canaveral for trials in outer space. She'd have an edge on real chimps—she can talk.'

'Christ—can she talk!' the Purser groaned. 'Name of Anderman—she's at my table. Thought she ought to be at the Captain's, and I had a hell of a time explaining to her that it just wasn't on. She's been tanking up ever since she came aboard, and now she's sizzed to the eyebrows.'

Mrs Anderman, who had reached the wharf, executed a clumsy dance of triumph.

'Well, I made it, Earl,' she said.

'Sure, Betsy, you made it. Now what d'you wanna do?'

'Jest watch—jest watch. Say, Earl, isn't it cunning, the way they balance those bags of fruit?'

Her husband nodded, and then moved off to see what the market-women had for sale. Betsy Anderman stood, fascinated by the swing and rhythm of the carriers, swaying a little herself, her large mouth half open, her mud-coloured eyes blinking. 'Easy,' she muttered to herself; 'easy—I could do it.'

Then she made a decision. She had an audience right here, and all she wanted ever was an audience.

She laughed out loud, carefully raised her big red handbag, balanced it on her head, and began to strut up and down.

Nobody noticed her at first. Her husband, several yards away, was meditating the purchase of a ten-gallon straw hat; loaders and tally clerks were too intent on their jobs; Mr Sant was

listening to a passenger who wanted to tell him an imperfectly remembered story about the resemblance between politicians and bananas; so Betsy had well over two minutes of quiet fun on her own. She was full of fun, as she used to tell her remaining friends; and now she was full of Scotch too, and thought pretty highly of the act she was putting on.

Suddenly one of the girls marching up to the loading port spotted her, stopped, cried out, and pointed. The girl following cannoned into her. Both dropped their loads. Within seconds every Negro on the wharf was yelling; mob fury spread like a forest fire; and Mr Sant, leaving the story-teller in mid-sentence, made record time down the gangway, jumped the last six steps, landed on his feet, and fought his way through to the storm centre, where Betsy, without a stitch left on her, was still on her feet, bewildered and tearful. Something, she felt, had gone wrong with the act.

'Outa this!' snapped Mr Sant, grabbing her arm that seemed as thick as a thigh, and beginning to shove her through the crowd. He raised his powerful voice. 'It's O.K., she's stinko, tight, plastered—got it?' he shouted.

'Why for she laugh at us?' a girl shouted back.

Mr Sant gained a few feet. 'Cos she's drunk—that's why.' He was aware of Mr Anderman beside him; helping to support the slug-like carcass. The crowd gave way a little, they were within a few feet of the gangway; a deck steward tossed down a rug, and as Mr Sant paused just long enough to cover Betsy's bloated nudity her husband cracked her across the face with his open hand. She screamed; and at the sound the crowd fell silent. 'Sorry, folks,' said Mr Anderman; 'I guess it's all my fault—shoulda sloshed her years ago.'

No more loading was done that night, but there was plenty of singing and shouting and the crowd on the wharf kept it up till past two o'clock. Towards the end they were dancing and laughing, but they wouldn't go back to work.

'Let 'em get it out of their system,' said the Harbour-Master to Mr Sant; 'they'll be back tomorrow.'

'So—and *we* lose a day. Can't sue that Yank ape either.'

He saw the port policeman who'd been on duty that morning, slowly ascending the gangway. 'Hi, Joe,' he hailed, 'want me?'

'Why, yes, Mr Sant, there are three of your passengers back up the road and their driver's scared to bring them in.'

'That'll be Lady Corbel and Mr and Mrs Semple,' he said with relief. He'd checked over all the passengers with the Purser, and knew those three were still missing. The Semples could jump in the drink for all he cared; but Lady Corbel was a V.I.P. 'Joe, our troubles are nearly over. Tell the driver it's O.K. It is, too; nearly everybody's gone home.'

'How would it be if I took the police car and brought them in?'

'You'll be booked for Heaven when you die, Joe.'

The policeman grinned. 'I'll fix it,' he promised.

Ten minutes later, Mavis should have been highly gratified because she was driven on to the wharf to within a few feet of the gangway; but she wasn't in the mood to feel grateful for the privilege.

SEVEN

The *Wenvoe* sailed a day late, leaving San Jago before dawn, so by the time the early risers among the passengers came on deck, the island was many miles astern, a humped, lavender-tinted shape, which became more and more indistinct until it merged with the clouds on the horizon. From the ship's grubby white funnel a plume of black smoke cast a trembling shadow over the wake.

Before lunch a rumour gradually spread among the passengers that the time lost at San Jago might cause the ship to be diverted from Southampton to Avonmouth. 'Wherever the hell *that* is,' said Mavis crossly, after trying vainly to make the Purser confirm or deny the change. 'We shan't know for another forty-eight hours, Mrs Semple,' was all he would say. She'd made some crisp remarks to Janet about British efficiency as they reclined on deck chairs side by side. Very mildly Janet reminded her that an American had been the cause of the delay and the possible change of destination.

'That Anderman woman's a case for Alcoholics Anonymous,' said Mavis; 'she's a chronic drunk—they come in all countries.'

'But rather more frequently in yours,' said a deceptively gentle voice. Mavis sat upright, took off her sunglasses and turned the full fighting power of her dark blue eyes on the speaker who occupied the deck chair on the other side of Janet. He smiled at her. He was a tall Englishman who might have been any age between forty and sixty, with a lean, sun-tanned face, grey eyes and faded brown hair. He looked cool and elegant in a cream linen suit. 'Forgive me for making the comment,' he continued; and Mavis, irritated though she was,

thought that his soft voice was a great improvement on the neighing, affected voices of most Englishmen. 'I'm sure you would agree that no country has exclusive rights in efficiency or inefficiency, or for that matter in sobriety or intemperance. So many of my American friends, men of my own age or thereabouts, have died much too young because of their dedication to hard liquor, and I rather resent it—that's all.'

Janet had met him earlier that morning, up in the bows, where she was watching the flying fish skittering from wave tip to wave tip. She liked his voice (all women did), and found his company soothing. She felt the need of soothing company; everybody on board seemed to be on edge, and the heat was unrelieved by the faintest breeze. His name was Mervin Icknield; he had just finished writing a history of the island, and had lived there for nearly two years. 'But I'm only an historian in what is perhaps humorously called my spare time,' he'd told her. He didn't say what he did with the rest of his time, but managed to imply that he was not and had never been one of the idle rich.

She introduced him to Mavis, who merely nodded, then turned to her husband who lay in the deck chair on her right, serenely contented with present thoughts and future plans. He'd only needed a little help—that was all. There must be girls who'd oblige, everywhere. He ignored his wife's sharp voice saying: 'I've left my cigarettes in the cabin.' She repeated her words, then added: 'Are you asleep?'

'No.'

'Did you hear what I said?'

'Yes.'

'Well?'

'Look, Mave, that's two lots of stairs down. O.K. with down. But figure it out for yourself, and you'll find that means two lots of stairs up. I'm reckoning to ration my stairs as they don't have elevators on this old tub.'

This was rebellion. Mavis had been troubled ever since that last evening ashore at the Mountain Tavern.

Mr Icknield produced a gold case. 'Allow me to offer you a cigarette,' he said. Mavis refused. 'Then allow me to call a deck steward,' he continued; 'he'll fetch your cigarettes. That's what deck stewards are for.' He beckoned to a surly creature in white, who for once moved fast. 'Get the stewardess who looks after Mrs Semple to bring her cigarettes from her cabin,' he ordered.

'Right away, sir.'

Mavis looked at him thoughtfully. 'How come you get that character to speak?' she demanded. 'I thought he could only grunt.'

Mr Icknield shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, that's the first sign of service I've seen on this ship,' said Marshall, unwrapping foil from a cigar. 'The only old-fashioned thing I go for is service, and on an old-fashioned steamship you might have expected it. Steam's finished. It's a dirty way of travel. Just look at that smoke back there.' He pointed at the black coils that hovered over the sea.

'At least you're spared the smell of diesel fumes,' Mr Icknield reminded him.

Marshall lit his cigar. Mr Icknield selected a cigarette from his case. 'You told me you didn't smoke,' he said to Janet; 'do you mind if I do?'

'Of course not,' she replied; 'I like the smell of it. Especially cigars,' she added; and Marshall smiled.

Presently the deck steward brought Mavis her cigarettes. She put the pack into her handbag, but didn't smoke. She was puzzled by this bland Englishman. She'd noticed that he had a table to himself in the dining-saloon where the Chief Steward fussed over him, and she knew he occupied one of the four suites the *Wentworth* boasted. Obviously he had a pull of some sort: those suites were booked up months ahead, and she'd only

secured one after a long battle with the Company's agent at Jamesport. She made a mental note to ask the Captain at lunch, for, with Janet, the Semples were at his table though Mavis didn't know the reason why. ('Are there any friends of yours you'd like to have at the same table, Lady Corbel?' the Purser had asked; and Janet knew what status symbols meant to Mavis.) But Captain Morgan, raging sober and incapable of coping with passengers, had lunch in his state-room.

Apart from the lost day, the voyage was starting badly. An hour before lunch, the improvised swimming pool on the sun deck had burst through one of the canvas sides, first emptying its contents over a row of carefully oiled young women who were stretched out on rugs, sun-bathing, then pouring down the companion to the main deck, and washing back a deck steward on his way up with a tray of ices. The bar, scheduled to open at noon, remained shut, and the Chief Steward had reported to the Purser and the Purser to the Captain, that Pilly, the rather scruffy bartender, was in no condition to open a bar, a bottle, or even his eyes. He'd slept on the floor of the bar, and could only murmur that his stomach was at him.

'Chuck the brute in his bunk till he sobers up,' said the Captain after he'd spoken his mind to the Purser.

Mr Sant reported one of the hands missing. 'Fernand, sir,' he said; 'the coon they call Smokey.'

Later on the Purser reported that Mrs Anderman, who had stayed put in her cabin since the Godiva incident, was having an attack of delirium tremens, and Dr Dindle, who had collected various tropical diseases and other complaints in his wandering, dissolute, and on the whole enjoyable life afloat, was down with a bout of malaria and had merely pointed to a box of sleeping pills when asked for advice about the patient. 'A ship gets the doctor it deserves,' said the Captain. 'Well? What am *I* supposed to do? Tell the stewardess to shove the pills into her, somehow, anyhow, or get her husband to—

maybe he'll give her too many, which'll save him the trouble of cutting her throat some day.'

Two hours before dinner Mr Sant made another report.

The Captain thanked him. 'This,' he said, 'was all I needed to make my day. I'm fortunate in my officers: they can't stop hands from jumping ship or prevent non-paying passengers from joining.'

'He must have come aboard with the loaders, sir,' ventured Mr Sant.

'Thank you, Mr Sant. That, of course, explains everything; so now we can be quite happy.'

Mr Sant was silent.

'Well? Why don't you say something?'

'I was thinking, sir—he wants to work his passage, and we've lost Fernand.'

'Dear me, dear me, so he wants to work his passage. That's very considerate of him.'

Despite his congenital irritability, Captain Morgan never swore, but he could make words bruise. He talked himself to a standstill, then told Mr Sant, who was feeling rather crumpled, to bring the stowaway to his cabin.

Five minutes later Suns Alpy was in the presence. For the first time in his life he was confronted with an angry white man, and one moreover who had vast powers. 'Oh, brother,' he said to himself; 'this is where I sure have to sell the goods.'

ARRIVAL

ONE

The following afternoon Janet, reclining in a deck chair on the shady side of the promenade deck, was roused from a light doze by a steward proffering two envelopes on a tarnished metal tray. One contained an invitation from Captain Morgan to cocktails in his cabin at six o'clock, the other a radiogram from her niece which read: 'Meeting ship. Stop. Staying with us. Stop. No argument. Laura and Jack.'

Laura, the only child of Sir John Corbel's elder brother, Charles, had lost both her parents in a car accident when she was a second year student at the Imperial School of Architecture. Janet was her only living relative, and also the only woman for whom she had any use at all. Women usually disliked Laura, often with good reason. Divorced by her first husband, she was now married to Jack Borrowdell, a top-flight business executive; but she kept her maiden name. Corbel, she insisted, was an apt name for an architect; and she had become an accomplished and commercially successful architect with a large and growing practice. All over England housing schemes of her design allowed people to live without missing the cosy squalor of the condemned slums they had left, for Laura Corbel's houses were not impersonal boxes for filing families. They could be turned into homes, because she had never made the inhuman mistake of regarding men and women as packaged goods. She gave to the skimmed projects sponsored by municipal and county authorities and eked out by mean government grants, something of the traditional grace of English design. The austere *avant-garde* of her profession, suspecting the warmth and variety of her imagination, elittled her success.

As an intellectual with a flair for business, she used her abilities without discarding the intellectual's lordly contempt for business as such. Her income was large, sometimes exceeding her husband's, who was managing director of the English branch of an international market and consumer research organization.

Before Jack Borrowdell joined the Navy he'd been earning his bread with adequate butter and a little jam on it in the research department of a big London advertising agency. He ended his war service as a Lieut.-Commander, and returned to his old firm with a sympathetic knowledge of people worth much fine gold. He didn't stay there long. He proceeded to collect some of that gold, climbing from one job to another without bothering too much about the bruised and bleeding shoulders he'd used as rungs on the way up. Now he liked to call himself one of 'industry's private eyes'.

The Borrowdells had a flat in Westminster, on Jack's expense account; a commodious but not too large cabin cruiser, moored upstream at Twickenham; and a seventeenth-century manor house of warm Cotswold stone, near Chipping Campden, within a few minutes' walk of that natural amphitheatre below Dover's Hill, where the Cotswold Games used to be held.

Although she knew how welcome she would be at Laura's home, Janet really wanted to go straight to her own house without being fussed over. She was tired of having everything 'laid on', longing to fend for herself again, much preferring her own modest standard of comfort to 'living it up' on Jack Borrowdell's super-luxury scale. The house would be filled with expensive people, if she was unlucky enough to be there at a weekend when Jack was entertaining clients, or with hairy young men and unkempt young women, wearing heavy, sweat-scented woollens, if Laura was being hospitable to some of her talented friends, or partners. But she couldn't refuse the invitation; she knew it really came from Laura although Jack's name was coupled with it; and she was fond of Laura for her

own sake, admiring her gifts and energy and above all her ardent love of life. Not that Laura would be hurt if she refused; nothing hurt her; but to be so ungracious was out of the question.

So she handed in a message of greetings and acceptance at the Purser's office on her way to the Captain's cabin. The Captain was alone, looking as if he had been poured into his tightly buttoned-up white uniform jacket and was about to overflow. She was relieved to find that he wasn't giving a party.

'I wanted to talk to you, Lady Corbel,' he explained; and when she had a tall glass of gin and lime in her hands he came straight to the point. 'We have a stowaway on board. I expect you know.'

Janet nodded. Everybody in the ship had known since Suns was discovered. The Captain continued: 'He claims to have met you. Have you seen him?'

She had caught a glimpse of Suns before breakfast, working with two of the hands, scrubbing down the fore-deck.

'Yes,' she said, 'and I recognized him.' She described the meeting at Vega, but didn't mention seeing him on the wharf the day before the ship sailed.

'He's a two-voice boy, Lady Corbel.'

'What does that mean, exactly?'

'One voice natural for his own folks, another when he's putting on the dog. He used the second one on me.'

'And on me too, I expect.'

'He helped one of my crew to stay ashore; another coloured man; and said he reckoned to take his place and work his passage. Talk about cool!'

'What'll happen to him when we get to England? Will he be charged with illegal entry or whatever they charge stowaways with?'

'Not necessarily. He'll have to explain himself to the police, of course; but he's a British subject; his passport's in order;

and he won't be prosecuted unless the Company wishes to prosecute.'

'Need they? Couldn't you do something about it, Captain?'

He drank what was left of his gin and lime, rang for his steward, and with a fresh glass in his hand, said:

'That doesn't rest with me.'

'He's an educated man.'

'Yes, he knows how to use that, too.' Captain Morgan didn't smile easily; but Janet identified the convulsive puckering of his mouth as an attempt. 'I gather he's taken a correspondence course in salesmanship,' he went on. 'I'll have a private word with Mr Icknield about him.'

Although mystified, Janet was too discreet to ask what Mr Icknield could do about Suns. The Captain enlightened her. 'Mr Icknield's the Company's resident director on the island,' he explained. 'Every two years he spends four months in England. What he says, goes.'

Janet laughed, and said: 'I think that young man was born lucky, don't you?'

'He'll need to be in England,' the Captain replied. 'I wouldn't care to be making my first trip there as a coloured man. He'll find life pretty tough.' He paused, then added: 'Do you mind not saying anything about Mr Icknield's connexion with the Company?'

'Are you sure that isn't known already?' she asked, recalling how the deck steward had jumped to his orders.

'Oh, the crew knows who he is—but you're the only passenger who does.'

'I shan't give him away,' she promised.

The Captain rang for the glasses to be refilled. He was two drinks ahead before Janet arrived, and now he was four to her two. Not that he needed liquor to get along with this passenger: she was all right: calm and sensible. No fool questions. He felt he could stand dinner tonight. She'd take the edge off that

smart club-type American judy and her dumb husband who let himself be pushed around.

'I'd like to help that young man,' said Janet, still thinking of Suns and the cold welcome awaiting him. 'How could I, Captain?'

'Unless you find him a job, I don't see how you could help. If he had a job to go to, nobody would worry much.'

'I see.' Janet was thinking of Laura, whose interest in people was as lively as her own. Laura and Jack both had prosperous businesses: surely something could be done for Suns, so his education could be used, not wasted. She wished she could write and let Laura know in advance what might be expected of her. She could hardly send a radiogram asking her to find a job for a Negro stowaway.

Well, but, couldn't she do just that? It was exactly the sort of thing Laura would do herself. Laura could be impulsively responsive and generous: sometimes too generous, a virtue that had got her into a lot of trouble and out of a marriage.

The Captain asked her why she was smiling.

She told him.

'That correspondence course in salesmanship is beginning to pay off,' he said.

TWO

Laura Corbel squatted on the hearth rug before a large crackling wood fire, tilting her head back to get the last drop of an old-fashioned cocktail, till the ice clicked against her teeth. She fished up the cherry with her fingers and ate it.

'Have another,' her husband suggested.

'I shouldn't really. That one's done enough damage to the waistline.'

'The waistline's fine. I've been running my eye over it ever since I've been back.'

'Jack, you always make me feel positively nude.'

'You always manage to suggest that you are, no matter what you've got on. And you have the wickedest of wicked faces.'

'How nice to be told that after all these years of marriage.'

'And whatever kind of rug you sit on always begins to look like a tiger skin.'

'Elinor Glyn had red hair.'

'But sin's always the same colour. Cum'on, babe, have another.'

'Another *what*?'

'Another old-fashioned. You can't make 'em properly with the stuff they export to us. This straight Kentucky's got twice the kick of what we're able to buy here; but we're not allowed to enjoy the American alcoholic way of life. It was worth the duty on three bottles to have their standard of living for a few weeks.'

'A few days, you mean, if we lash into it like this.' He took her glass, and while he was mixing another drink she continued

reflectively: 'I suppose I'll have to get adjusted again to the aggressive American executive you always turn into after you've been at the New York office. Every morning for weeks afterwards I expect to find a crew-cut on the next pillow instead of the bald reality.'

He handed her a fresh drink, and said: 'Every day for months after I'm back here I feel that anything's possible, that everything's within reach.'

'Surely not a crew-cut for a man with no hair?'

Jack Borrowdell was silent for a moment.

'Now you're going all serious on me,' she complained, watching his face. 'Any moment now you'll try managing and directing; and I won't be managed or directed. Not in the home, I won't.'

'I guess we've gone soft,' he said, ignoring her protest. 'The idea soon gets sunk, without trace.'

'What idea?'

'That anything's possible. *We* used to have a spirit of adventure. *We* used to say, "Well boys, it hasn't been done before—let's have a bash." But not now. Not, I guess, for a long time.'

'Have you got to keep on saying, "I guess"?''

'Get a subsidy, get a safety-belt, get a feather-bed—get anything except a move on. That's our line, honey.'

'Darling, you *have* got a bad attack. And, please repeat, please, *don't* call me honey. It sounds like a coal-black mammy talking.'

'We've lost the spirit of enterprise.'

'Perhaps we'd get it back if we could buy Bourbon as strong as this. I shall be plastered soon.' She swirled the golden liquor round in the fat tumbler so the ice cubes and the slice of orange played hide and seek with the cherry. After tasting it she said: 'And talking of enterprise, what about Aunt Janet shooting off to the West Indies? She's always had such a quiet, sheltered life, and at fifty-three——'

‘That’s nothing. By American standards, a mere girl. You have American women of eighty-five doing world tours, and by plane—none of your slow, cosy old ships for them.’

‘What I meant was, that for her it was a terrific bit of uprooting. And don’t belittle Aunt Janet. I know she makes you feel inferior, but——’

‘She does nothing of the kind,’ he interrupted. ‘She’s a dear, but she does manage to suggest, without ever saying so, that I’m a predatory character, engaged in the predatory task of encouraging the poor to squander their hard-earned; not that there are any poor left—or hardly any. I suppose she’s inherited her husband’s attitude of mind and his cargo of sympathy for what he used to call the under-privileged.’

‘She’s never got over Uncle John’s death.’

‘I wonder if you’d be as faithful to my memory.’

‘My dear, I’m not faithful to you now, though I love you dearly. Every woman wants some time off in another bed, and every sensible woman knows that a man does, too, and shuts her eyes when he takes a holiday. As we’re both sensible, we don’t overdo it.’

Jack Borrowdell remembered what his ex-best friend had said to him ten years ago. ‘You can’t marry Laura Corbel, old boy—one husband has ditched her already. Sleep with her by all means and any means—she’s a wonderful lay, but marry, no, no, a thousand times no! They used to call her the bed-bug. She’s a nympho. Tremendous fun and all that, but——’

The conversation had ended there. Jack had just held himself back from clocking Phil Kale—only just. He never spoke to him or saw him again, for Phil had gone to Africa and got himself killed by Mau-Mau terrorists; but everything he’d said about Laura was true—every damn word. Her sexual precocity as a student at the Imperial School of Architecture had more than justified her unlovely nickname. She was a tall, emphatic bru-

nette, with hot, slumberous eyes that seemed to have warm brown flames flickering behind them; a mobile, expressive mouth, with moist lips, which she never touched with lipstick; a determined chin, and a figure that drew men's eyes to her, irrespective of age, calling, or race. Her voice was deep-toned, and she knew how to play on it to suit every situation, from a business conference to a bedroom scene. She made love with the carnal ingenuity of a high-priced whore.

Yes, Phil had been right, except for one thing: Laura had been worth marrying. Living with her was exciting, and Jack Borrowdell felt that he would never grow old so long as they were together. She could refresh a man with her inexhaustible vitality, and even if she did hurt like hell sometimes, she always seemed to do it with an air of bland innocence. He occasionally told himself, very loud and clear, that he had no regrets; just to recharge his confidence and to smack down the little sneering doubts that popped up now and then, especially after he'd been away for a few weeks. Sometimes he told himself that he was besotted, contemptibly besotted, by the woman, and always came back at himself with, 'O.K., then, I'm besotted, and I like it that way.'

They had been married in the last year of the war, and parted for eleven months after a week's honeymoon. He knew, directly he came home, that she'd been unfaithful. He got used to it, though he still minded. Any sort of life without her was inconceivable.

Laura sank about half the liquor in her glass.

'I wish I could sip,' she said. 'I always have to dash at everything. There's only one thing I like doing slowly.'

'And I suppose there's been quite a bit of the slow-motion act while I've been listening to the yes-man's chorus in the New York Office.'

'No—I've been far too busy. I've saved up for you. And it was good, wasn't it? But we were talking about Aunt Janet.'

'You were.'

'We both were. I radioed her ship to say I'd meet her and she must stay here for a bit. And I've had two radiograms back, one accepting, and another asking if we can do with a Negro stow-away.'

'That sounds a bit odd, for Aunt Janet, doesn't it?'

'Not really—she's pulling somebody out of a hole, as usual. She's always doing that. I expect she welcomes the chance. Reading between the lines from her letters, I don't think she enjoyed herself much on the island. I can't see her fitting into that Government House set-up. Personally I loathe Angela Brede: a sort of female stuffed shirt. The perfect Governor's lady, full of protocol or whatever they stuff shirts with. I should think poor old Udimore has to submit an application in triplicate if he wants to sleep with her; but then he can't *want* to. Thinks of it as a duty, I expect, and gets himself reminded by an attaché or a secretary or something official when it's F-day. I've met her when they've been home on leave, and she's so county that if she was acting the part on the stage everybody would say it was overdone; but she isn't acting. She's the genuine female of the county families. Didn't somebody once say that they were the intellectual scum of the earth, or have I got it the wrong way round?'

'It's the straight Kentucky misquoting.'

'The only thing in her favour is her devotion to Aunt Janet.'

Laura finished her drink, then looked at Jack. Dear Jack. There was something about that high bald head and sharp-featured, good-humoured face that always chased every other man out of her mind and memory. He was tall, broad-shouldered though slender, and had the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. Sometimes they seemed to be violet. They could still laugh together, and at each other; even when in her more intensely serious moments humour deserted her, he could

always coax it back without dismissing lightly whatever it was she was being serious about. Dear Jack. She suspected that he was faithful to her. She blinked, then smiled and said:

'I can't help being what used to be called soppy about you, darling. I simply adore that bald, youthful head, and the way you veil your eyes like a crocodile or a bird or something, and look at me as if I'm too good to be bad or too bad to be true or something. Darling, I'm almost tight.'

'You're a swell proposition when you're tight, babe.'

'Please, darling, stop using those illiterate American clichés, and *don't* call me babe: it's far worse than honey. And give me another drink.'

'Then you'll be quite tight—not almost.'

'Perhaps, but I'll become amorous.'

He took her tumbler at once and refilled it.

'We'll have to pretend the rug's a tiger-skin,' he said.

And later, as they sat side by side on a settee facing the flickering fire, his arm round her waist, she said: 'What shall we do with the Negro stowaway?'

'Sounds like the beginning of a sea-shanty,' he murmured drowsily.

'Jack—you're *not* to go to sleep. This is serious. Aunt Janet's arriving at Southampton or Avonmouth in *just* over a week, and we shall have to do something about him.'

'Who?'

She pinched him, hard. 'Wake up!' she commanded. 'The stowaway—the Negro stowaway Aunt Janet's bringing home to us as a present or a problem.'

He was silent, but she knew he was wide awake now. Presently he said:

'He might do. We'll have a look at him. I've got an idea.'

'Not a butler, darling. I won't wear a butler.'

'Who said anything about butlers? I might be able to use

him for research—just how effectively or in what way I can't tell till I see the character. But it might fit in with something I've been mulling over since I spent an evening in Harlem with one of our motivation boys. Anyway, we'll radio Aunt Janet and tell her we've got a job lined up.'

THREE

'Welcome to England, cully,' said the big, red-haired bosun of the *Wenvoe*, clapping Suns on the back with a hand the size of a small ham; 'ere we are, and this is it.' He bellowed with laughter, and added: 'But cheer up, me old black cock—summer's coming.'

Suns smiled as well as a man can whose teeth are chattering. Throughout the voyage his luck had held; he possessed that inexplicable gastric disposition which makes a man a good sailor, and although he ached in every limb from the motion of the ship, he'd escaped sea-sickness. He realized that England would be colder than anything he'd ever known or imagined; but he hadn't reckoned on a wind like a razor slash. Roaring down from the North East, funnelled through the Severn Valley into the Bristol Channel, that cutting horror of a wind flayed everybody's nerves, except the bosun who hadn't any. He slapped Suns on the back again. 'Your pal Smokey's a lot warmer than you are,' he said, with another gust of laughter. 'Never mind, pal—you done the right thing getting him back home where he belongs. He was so bloody miserable here that he went about looking as if he'd swallowed a hearse. And you ain't done so bad—you've mucked in all right and never run away from a job o' work. Yes, and you're lucky, too. You got a job waiting for you.'

'Yeah, I'm lucky all right,' Suns agreed. If he hadn't believed in his luck and himself he'd have been almost ready to jump overboard when they'd left the warm seas and sunshine behind, and the Atlantic set about giving them a dirty passage. He'd lived on self-confidence, and whenever it sank low and almost

flickered out, something always came along to blow up the flame to its normal, unwavering brightness. That happened after Janet had received a reply from Laura and had been allowed to reassure him, so he knew that he had somewhere to go and something to do. 'Can collect him too,' Laura's radiogram had ended.

Janet had discussed that message with the Captain, who said: 'There's no reason why he shouldn't go with you and your niece if you don't mind waiting while he's dealt with by the Immigration Office. That may take a bit of time, though.'

Janet was prepared for that. She knew her Laura. Once away from that busy London office of hers, Laura could squander time regally. And Mr Icknield had undertaken to smooth things over so far as the Company was concerned.

Suns the lucky, that's me, he thought, after Janet gave him the good news. His boast to Julie that Lady Corbel was one of his contacts hadn't proved idle, though at the time he hadn't a clue about how she could help him or indeed why she should. He just felt that she might—had sensed the latent kindness that usually prevented Janet from being able to say 'No'. And now—everything was organized; the first strings had been pulled; and he didn't have to worry about what would happen when he landed.

'Everything's organized,' he repeated to himself. He liked the phrase. The words were comforting, and as bits of England began to appear while the *Wenvoe* plugged on, rolling badly in a heavy swell, those unpromising fragments of land made him feel the need of comfort. Cornwall was intermittently visible to starboard; when they'd passed the intimidating shape of Lundy Island, Devon came north to meet them; and then they ran along the coast of Somerset, which looked in the distance as bleak as the grey sea and much the same colour. On the port side, Wales emerged from a veil of rain. The Channel narrowed, and the islands of Flat Holme and Steep Holme took shape be-

fore them, a low-crowned hat and a battered topper, tossed on the sea by some careless giant and miraculously petrified. The light was failing, and the wind losing its force. Flaws of icy rain hammered the decks.

The Purser broke the news to the passengers that although the *Wenvoe* would dock that night, several hours might pass before she moved up to the head of the queue of ships waiting to enter the port. That meant another night on board, but an early breakfast would be served, and a special boat train would leave the dock for Paddington at ten o'clock, allowing plenty of time for the Customs and other formalities. He tried to make it all sound very efficient, cosy even, but didn't succeed. Many of the passengers, raging at the prospect of yet another night on the *Wenvoe*, were heartily sick of the ship and the shortcomings of the service. Even some returning missionaries were dangerously near impatience: denied the consolations of alcohol they took their discomforts neat. The other passengers kept the bar busy. That bar, which had been cool and comfortable in the Caribbean, was now cold, draughty, and repellent, smelling of damp leather and stale beer. The stewards, who were as yet untipped, were alert and obliging; those who had been, either went off duty or ignored everybody.

'Well, we're all in the same boat,' said a stout little bore named Edwards. He laughed with the shameless confidence of a man used to laughing alone, then said: 'Ah, well. Joke over.' He had pale blue pop-eyes, a gleaming bald head, and the mottled, coarse-grained complexion of a man who habitually did himself too well. He had joined the Semples in the bar after the Purser had made his announcement. Mr Edwards was always hunting for an audience. Ever since they left San Jago he had been trying to remember a story about politicians and bananas, so he plumped himself down in a chair next to Mavis, ordered a double Scotch, and tried to lead up to the subject. He was never discouraged. When his Scotch arrived,

he said: 'D'you know, Mrs Semple, I've got it now—word perfect.'

Mavis threw him some blue ice. She said, 'Yes?' and made the query sound like a curse.

'It's about bananas,' he confided.

'They have a life of their own,' she said.

Mr Edwards showed her a lot of yellow teeth. 'Why, Mrs Semple, that's good,' he declared. 'A life of their own, hey? That's great.'

'And it's lived on this damn boat at our expense,' she added, then turned to Marshall and said: 'Stay right here and be entertained. I want words with that Purser.'

She went.

Mr Edwards beckoned a steward. 'Have one with me, Semple,' he invited. An audience with a drink was a captive audience. With a large Scotch in his hand Marshall was preparing to listen when Mr Edwards spotted Janet in the doorway of the bar. He waved an invitation. She smiled and came over. He had made three abortive attempts to tell the banana story to her, and he wasn't going to be stopped now. 'I've remembered it, Lady Corbel,' he almost shouted. 'Word perfect. Got it, pat. Now, may I order you something?'

'That's very kind of you, Mr Edwards; but you know I've had more to drink on this ship than I normally have in a year.'

'Why, Janet, that sounds terrible,' said Marshall.

'Please, Lady Corbel,' pleaded Mr Edwards.

'Very well then—a dry sherry. Thank you very much.'

'We once ran a slogan, "It's smart to drink sherry",' said Marshall; 'it got the habit established. What it did to my liver when I had client conferences is just nobody's business. I hate the stuff. Give me Scotch or Bourbon or Rye or planter's punch like they had up at that Mountain Tavern—remember, Janet?'

'I remember you had so many that you didn't feel like coming out for a last drive with Mavis and me after lunch.'

Marshall smiled. He was thinking how this refined English lady would curl up with shock if she knew what had happened that afternoon. If he'd even suspected that her reactions might be tolerant and sympathetic he would have been profoundly shocked himself.

Some indifferent sherry was brought.

'Happy landings,' said Mr Edwards, raising his glass. 'Now we'll really get down to that story,' he continued. 'What's the resemblance between a bunch of bananas and a bunch of politicians, hey?'

At this moment Mavis rejoined the party. Mr Edwards gave her his chair, collected another and drew it up beside her. 'As I was just saying, he began, when Mavis cut in with:

'I might have known—the British week-end!'

'Not a bad institution,' said Janet; 'and you've adopted it in America, haven't you?'

Mavis paid no attention. She started to unwind a vast panorama of complaint. 'I'm about through with this hell-ship. Believe it or not, that dumb cluck of a Purser can't even fix a car to meet us tomorrow. All I get from him is that it's Sunday. So, it's Sunday, and he can't contact anything anywhere by telegraph, and even when we dock there'll be no ship-to-shore telephone. It's Sunday—nothing happens.'

'“Never on Sunday”,’ Mr Edwards quoted, and began to follow on with, 'Well, as I was saying——'

Marshall interrupted. 'There's a train, Mave,' he said; 'why worry about transport? We've all the time in the world. Let it ride.'

'The likeness is pretty obvious when you think it over,' Mr Edwards persisted, with a throaty chuckle. 'You see, they're all——'

Mavis just went on talking, and Janet stopped listening

Mavis and the inanities of the ship's entertainment programme had depressed her unbearably during the last week. The nice little innocent girl that had sometimes peeped out of Mavis seemed to have gone for good: only a spoilt brat remained, a demanding, intolerable brat. The ship was too small to escape from her, and Janet couldn't pretend to be sea-sick and stay in her suite; she liked people too much to condemn herself to such isolation; anyway, she was too good a sailor and rather enjoyed rough weather. So she had Mavis for lunch and dinner and tea—never for breakfast, for Mavis had orange juice in her suite and seldom appeared before eleven o'clock—and then after dinner the mechanized entertainment: horse racing, bingo, dancing to canned music, very old films, and Marshall in an alcoholic daze reordering drinks for himself and everybody in sight while Mavis shrilled at him.

She knew that it would all grow small and remote when she was back at home, like a view seen through the wrong end of field glasses; but now it all seemed larger than life, with every petty irritation magnified.

I shall laugh about all this in a week or two, she said to herself. Then something happened which made that impossible.

FOUR

When Mavis had something to say she continued to talk, even if somebody else was speaking or trying to speak. Mr Edwards hadn't a chance. He put the banana story back into storage, as he had done so often before, and listened. 'The trouble is that you've too much time,' she said to Marshall, 'and what do you do with it? Get in my hair most days. Since you've retired I've had half the income and twice the husband.'

'Sounds like one of Bob Hope's cracks,' Marshall interjected.

'It's true.'

'Not half the income. Be fair, Mave. We can do pretty much what we like.'

'Then why don't we.'

Mr Edwards drained his Scotch and said, surprisingly: 'Bicker, bicker, bicker.'

Mavis gasped. Janet felt embarrassed. Marshall grinned. 'What about that banana yarn you've been threatening us with?' he demanded before Mavis could say anything.

Mr Edwards lost no time. 'Politicians are like a bunch of bananas because they're all yellow, not one of them straight, and they all hang together,' he said, rushing the words out before anybody could stop him.

Marshall laughed. 'Yeah, that's slick,' he said. 'What about another Scotch?'

'I wouldn't say no.'

'I would,' came Mavis's veto: 'you've both had enough.'

'I'm not your husband, Mrs Semple,' said Mr Edwards. The successful delivery of his story had gone to his head, and he was feeling truculent.

'You'd be very different if you were,' she told him.

'So would you,' he returned; 'I'd beat you black and blue, and I believe you'd like it.'

Mavis, turning her back on him, said to Janet: 'I hear that they're going to let that stowaway land.'

'He's a British subject,' said Janet.

'You're welcome to him. I suppose he'll be on National Assistance, or whatever Commie hand-out you have.'

'Steward,' bawled Mr Edwards.

'This is mine, Edwards,' protested Marshall.

'Not a bit of it—I've been trying to get that story off my chest, and now it's well and truly off, we must celebrate.'

Two double Scotches were ordered, while Mavis waited for Janet's comment. She was disappointed. Janet wouldn't rise: she smiled gently but said nothing. Only a few more hours, and she'd be home—or at least with people who lived because they liked to be alive, and were unconcerned with conformity, status, power, or petty malice. She wondered what Laura would make of Mavis; Laura who never disguised an emotion or thwarted an impulse, never got her face carefully adjusted to suit a situation, was always completely natural, and as frank as the Recording Angel might be about herself and everybody else.

Mavis continued. 'Mr Icknield told me that he'd be quite welcome. Somebody's got a job lined up for him, it seems.'

Janet was silent. The steward slopped two Scotches down on the table. Mavis leant forward, picked up one of them and handed it back to the steward. 'Take that away,' she commanded.

Janet saw Marshall lurch from his chair. He stood up. 'He's going to hit her,' she thought, but instead he towered over his wife, swaying slightly.

One of those fleeting and unpredictable moments of silence came to the bar, so his fall to the deck resounded like the crash

of a felled tree. It was the most opportune heart attack he'd ever had—and his last.

Janet recalled the tone of his voice at the Mountain Inn when he'd said to Mavis: 'You'll just love being a widow.'

Mavis would make an elegant widow, a widow with poise and authority, fulfilling the highest function of American womanhood: unchallenged in tyranny, with the meal ticket filed for ever.

'Oh, but that's mean and unfair,' she thought, feeling guilty. Mavis might in time become the correct pattern of widow, hard, bright, and streamlined, because she would always conform, always be what was expected of her; but now she was stricken, far from home, about to enter a foreign country. She looked dismayed and incredulous, and Janet knew that she felt, as she herself had felt when John died, that this couldn't really be happening—not to her. And when Marshall's body had been taken to an empty cabin, and the ship's surgeon, the Captain, and the Purser had taken themselves off, still murmuring the sentimental incoherencies they mistook for words of sympathy, Janet said: 'Let me look after everything for you.' Till then Mavis had been dry-eyed. Now she wept, beautifully and tidily, already assuming her new dignity. She was silent till they reached Janet's suite, then she said, rather surprisingly, and with desolation in her voice: 'I don't know *what* to do.'

Janet repeated her offer to look after everything. 'My dear, I have been through this myself,' she said; 'I know what it means.' And as she spoke she felt the words were stupidly commonplace and inadequate as words are apt to be in the presence of death.

There was so much to do that Janet temporarily forgot all about Suns. The Purser reminded her of him after breakfast. 'I'll have to leave him to Laura,' she decided. Laura wouldn't mind.

Laura didn't.

FIVE

Laura 'phoned Jack at Researchers-United Limited, late on Monday afternoon. The firm had offices in Victoria Street, Westminster, on the same side and not far from the Army and Navy Stores, and within easy walking distance of the Borrowdells' flat. With an inside staff of seventy and nearly two hundred field workers, Jack was increasing the size and scope of the business every year. Starting with a small capital, of which some was put up by Laura, he had expanded steadily, following the Northcliffe rule of ploughing money back into the business till it almost dripped out of it, though without allowing his energy and constructive imagination to go unrewarded.

His activities included industrial relations and consultancy, and the discovery, measurement, and exploration of new markets. His success was based partly on his inventive fecundity, for after he'd identified a potential market he thought up ways of satisfying it, either with new products, or old ones with a face-lift; but the plinth on which his reputation was built was his knowledge of people, his intuitive awareness of their reactions, and his belief that the warm, lively realities of life were too often masked by the phoney jargon of brash young marketeers who would describe the simple act of a woman buying something in a shop as 'consumer off-take', and lose sight of the fact that a human being had come into the picture, not an insentient receptacle. Like Laura, he never lost touch with the living image of men and women.

'The characters who invented all those god-awful terms have brains but no bowels or balls,' he would say to his staff. When surveys and statistics were interpreted he wouldn't allow any-

body to ignore eccentric, non-conforming types, who deliberately misled interviewers, pulled their legs, told them to go to Hell, or snapped out, 'don't know'. Jack's orders were to play them along, patiently. 'Find out what makes those awkward buggers tick and you're home with a lot of problems, and you often turn up something that gives you a line on the general mass,' he would tell his often sceptical research specialists. Occasionally the study of such diverse irrelevancies disclosed an unsuspected market. 'Never write off anybody as unimportant,' was another of his rules. Whoever you were, a client, a prospective client, a senior or junior member of the staff, or a casual acquaintance, Jack made you feel that you had personal importance for him, and gave you his devoted attention; and that attentiveness wasn't an act either; it was generated by authentic interest. He never grew tired of studying people; he had never been bored in his life.

Borrowdell Research Limited, as it was called before the American take-over, acquired a reputation for unorthodox but resoundingly successful methods. Jack himself was wooed by more than one big industry, but he was doing very nicely thank you and having a lot of stimulating excitement. The business was so very much alive and kicking, that it attracted the most promising young men and women. Jack never made the mistake of being tied to the office; he knew how to delegate loaded responsibility on to likely men, and if they couldn't take it that was just too bad, and they were out on the ear after two mistakes: everybody was allowed to make one. He made regular trips to America to keep upsides with the latest techniques of motivation and consumer research, and nearly always took one of his executives along. He was clear-minded about American know-how, and rejected the idea that it worked everywhere. Far too many of his countrymen talked reverently about the American *mystique*, but while he acknowledged that their research methods and sampling suited the United States and some other

countries, he knew that the perplexingly unpredictable British public had not yet been smoothed into receptive uniformity by high-pressure salesmanship, T.V. viewing, and the financial and moral strain of keeping up with the Joneses.

He had announced and defended these heresies when, three years ago, he had been approached by Tobias Golantly—T.G., as everybody called him—the formidable President of Researchers-United Inc, who had built a world-machine for investigating the buying habits of every race and class. T.G. coveted Borrowdell Research as the ideal English set-up for completing his international organization.

Jack remembered those preliminary talks with him, and how he had resolved never to become such a dull final sentence of a success story. There was no love of life in T.G., no lightness, no humour, just a mean intentness on gain and a lust for status, a fine mental climate for raising ulcers. 'No,' he said to himself, 'no—it isn't worth it if that's what you turn into.' He looked at the sad brown eyes, the yellow lizard-skin face, the pointed pike's jaws, the slack, overweight body, and resolved that if he did allow his firm to be taken over, he wouldn't be absorbed by a machine which turned out such de-humanized products. He would go on being himself, forming and following his own policies, and rejecting dictation from New York if it threatened his own beliefs. He wasn't intimidated by mere size, and remained unimpressed by the offices that filled the five topmost floors of a skyscraper in Madison Avenue, and by T.G.'s lush penthouse above, which seemed to be filled by Marcella, T.G.'s massive, Junoesque blonde wife, who was twenty years younger than her husband and had roving and rather bulging eyes which were the nearest thing Jack had ever seen to blue poached eggs.

'Of course I'll develop faster with fresh capital and a tie-up with your organization,' Jack had admitted; 'I know all that, but I'm not parting with control.'

'We don't operate any other way.' T.G. had said that with an air of finality.

'Well, then, that's that,' Jack replied with a smile.

'Don't you want to grow along with us?'

'I'm growing on my own, and I'll keep on growing.'

'But look, we're *international*; don't act crazy, Jack.'

Jack had grinned and said with good-humoured frankness: 'I'm allergic to being pushed around. You could never buy *me*, because I'd just be dishonest—I wouldn't stay bought. I'm not going to be told how to run the show, and even if I considered coming into this I must have an escape clause in case you found you couldn't stand the sight of my face and vice versa after we'd been in it together for a couple of years. Check?'

'No,' said T.G. emphatically. 'No. Just like that, Jack. *NO!*'

'All right. Let's forget it. No hard feelings, I hope?'

There obviously were. T.G. wasn't used to having the power and the might and the splendour and the mission and the world reputation of Researchers-United Inc, smacked down like that. He was wounded: he pulled out all the sentimental stops in an organization recital that went on for hours. He actually wept; tears rolled down the furrows beside that long pointed nose and dropped off the pike's jaws. It was harrowing—especially for T.G.'s ulcers.

There were other discussions; indeed the discussions seemed interminable, and were resumed every time Jack visited New York. Because they *were* renewed, always with the assumption that a fresh and happy start was being made, Jack knew how badly T.G. wanted him. Then one day he made a decision. It may have had something to do with the day itself, for it was spring in New York, there was no humidity, the air sparkled and was as stimulating as champagne, and the city's towers were looking as sleek and svelte as modish women—even the elderly Chrysler and Empire State buildings seemed to have renewed

their youth in the luculent sunshine. He had been dickering on and off for a year and a half with T.G., and at one point the figure of \$150,000 had floated into the conversation after some casual reference to the value of goodwill. Jack decided to sell the goodwill of Borrowdell Research Limited for all he could screw out of T.G. He'd up the figure of \$150,000 to \$250,000, and let R-U Inc have control while he managed, without interference, the English branch, pricing his own services at £8,000 a year, plus expenses.

They compromised at \$200,000; the deal went through; and Jack became chairman and managing director of Researchers-United Limited, London, with powers to hire and fire and to run things his way and by his methods. There was also the escape clause.

Everything else had followed. The Cotswold Manor, the spacious Westminster flat, an ever-widening circle of contacts, a foot firmly in the door of big industry, and a tie-up with two large advertising agencies, one American, one British, who used R-U Ltd as an extension of their own research outfits. (Jack put a lot of business in their way.)

He never thought any more about that escape clause. He would never have merged with R-U Inc if he hadn't seen very clearly that behind the ballyhoo, the hoked-up solemnities about service and uplift, the almost servile faith in statistics, the obsession with means and habitual disregard of ends, the hair-trigger sensitivity of T.G., this American outfit throbbed with vitality and was motivated by an adventurousness of spirit that got things done and done well, thoroughly and quickly, smashing through obstacles as if they weren't there—indeed refusing to acknowledge the existence of obstacles. Sometimes the wrong things were done; but mistakes were written off with the same decisive courage that made them. "This sends me," Jack admitted to ^{his} Laura, when he returned from visits to his American colleagues imbued with their bright spirit of enterprise,

though happily immune from their more juvenile anti-social and political illusions. Laura might pull his leg about the Americanisms that glittered like spangles in his speech, though they were not, as she suggested, a form of protective mimicry, but a sincere tribute to his admiration for pictorial verbalisms that had enriched the English tongue, a tribute also to his admiration for the alert American way of business life.

He never quarrelled with Laura's criticisms and reservations, prompted by her almost obligatory belief as an intellectual in the unsoundness of American ideas of society; he never quarrelled with T.G. either. He was consistently frank with him, which was a new experience for the President who for years had been surrounded by 'yes' men. The tactful executives of R-U always tried to figure out what line the chief would take before risking an opinion of their own. They tried to appear positive, constructive, imaginative, up-and-coming and on-the-spot, but sufficiently non-committal to allow a switch of view to keep them in line with authority when the chief at last uttered. And this was terrible for their ulcers.

Jack was frank to the point of bluntness about all that. 'I'm not a bum-licker, T.G.,' he'd said at the outset; 'sorry—for bum read ass. Let's be polite and say boot instead. I've never qualified as a "yes" man. Let's be quite clear about it: I shall often disagree with you. Agreed about my disagreeing.'

'Welcome it, my boy,' T.G. had rumbled.

'You won't, you know. You'll hate it like hell because you don't get disagreement from your executives.'

'That's because we generally think along the same lines. We're a real happy family.'

'Well, as I'm marrying into this happy family, you'll have to accept me as an awkward relative.'

'We want you,' said T.G. 'Let's leave it right there.' He had sounded sincere; and as he'd made a big financial investment in Jack Borrowdell's brains and reputation he probably was.

While T.G. was prepared to wear Jack's independence, he wasn't at first prepared to extend such tolerance to members of Jack's staff. He wanted to know what kind of people Jack hired, and when executives from the London office visited New York, they were subjected to an unobtrusive but penetrating inquisition into their background and private lives to assess, from a purely American angle of course, their social acceptability. Jack identified the purpose of those hospitable little parties that Marcella Golantly gave in the penthouse over the office, or at the Golantly residence near Katonah in Westchester, where he was bidden to bring his bright young men to meet the top R-U executives and their wives. (T.G. usually kept in the background and left it to the women.) He was amused by the technique, and the way his people responded to it; and occasionally took a hand himself—once with such devastating effect that no more of those parties were given.

The party that was to end all parties happened when he brought his second-in-command, Andy Mulgrove, to New York. Andy was a big, rather untidy man, whose limbs appeared to be casually attached to a rather plump body; his large bald forehead, round face, and innocent blue eyes gave him the look of an amused, overgrown baby. He was a specialist in motivation research, who had never become its victim, and a psychologist who had retained his human likeness. Life entertained him. Though always on the threshold of laughter he was a serious and highly accomplished executive. Nobody would have taken Andrew Stuart Mulgrove for an old Etonian, or a psychologist either; and he was something new in the experience of those quizzing American wives. He was given the full treatment, and when the women began kiddingly to ask him about his wife, Letitia, and became searingly intimate, even inquiring about her menstrual habits, Jack broke in and said: 'Just for the record, folks, Letty's rather like my wife—says just what she thinks and doesn't give a hoot in hell what anybody

thinks of her. Oh, and just something Andy hasn't mentioned—she's the Lady Letitia Mulgrave, and the "lady" comes in front because she's a daughter of the eighth Earl of Bebbington. But don't let that worry you—the peerage was created by Charles II for one of his bastards. Practically everybody in England's descended from him, you know.'

As they were driven back to New York in a Cadillac with electronically controlled seats and gold-plated interior fittings, Jack said to Andy: 'Boy, I'll say you're socially acceptable now!'

'I thought you were rather raw with them,' Andy replied.

'Not a bit of it—they're like Germans in a way; you've got to smack 'em down before they respect you.'

'Somebody once described Americans as sawn-off Central Europeans speaking a dialect of English. That's unkind: as people I like 'em, but I can't take their women. Incidentally, one dame there had a Central European accent as thick as her nose. As for the others—you could see through the cracks in the chromium, and what was behind wasn't particularly alluring.'

Jack relied a lot on Andy's judgment. After Laura rang up he'd said to him: 'I've a hunch about a new market—small just now, but certain to expand, and conveniently concentrated in well-defined areas of London and the Midlands. Could be a big thing. It'll give a new meaning to "Black Market", and we ought to be on to it now, as we were first on to the potentialities of the teenage market. All these coloured immigrants must have special needs and tastes, and we must pinpoint them, and then find the right boys to satisfy 'em. They've got money to spend.'

'We used to save their souls, now we pick their pockets.'

'You and Laura have a lot in common,' Jack told him, and wondered just how much more they shared in addition to a critical attitude to commerce. Such comments from Laura were inspired by the intellectual's disdain for business—Andy's by cynical realism.

'We'll have to do some field research,' said Andy, 'and none of our teams'll be any good. Wrong colour. For authentic dope we want investigators who're blacker than black.'

'Agreed. And we'll have to train 'em. I've got a potential trainee in the bag, and he'll be here tomorrow. I'll see him first, and turn him over to you.'

Laura had rung up from an hotel in Clifton, where Janet and Mavis were installed. Janet was staying with Mavis, at least for that night, while the formalities following Marshall's death were sorted out. It was easier for a stowaway to enter England than a corpse.

'That's enough about the brand new widow and Aunt Janet's good nature,' he'd finally interrupted her; 'what about this coloured stowaway? Has he got anything?'

'An education, to begin with.'

'Right—that's all I need to know. Put him on a train tomorrow morning as early as you can, and give him his taxi fare from Paddington. Better make it ten bob.'

'Don't you want to know anything more about him?'

'Well, how do you react to him?'

'Tall, handsome, and, of course, dark. Dripping with charm.'

'Maybe you'd better put him on a train tonight.'

'How suspicious you are, darling. No, I'll look after him. He's a bit scared, though he tries not to show it, and of course he's half-frozen.'

'Then for God's sake buy him an overcoat—on the firm.'

'I have, darling. We've done a bit of shopping in Bristol, and I've really leant over backwards to look after him—but he's still scared.'

'Maybe that's why.'

He was right. Suns was scared stiff of Laura.

SIX

Ever since Laura's first appraising glance, Suns had felt uneasy. Janet, wholly occupied with Mavis, had been left behind at Clifton, and now he was alone with this strange white woman who had him really worried, sitting beside her in the dark blue Rolls-Bentley that she drove with an air of urgency.

'We'll have some food when we arrive,' she promised, as they headed north-west from Bristol through Chipping Sodbury and Stroud and on to the Cheltenham road. She'd done the journey in under three hours that morning, she told him, but now it would take longer. It was dark, and there was a lot of traffic about. 'He must be damn tired,' she thought, and aloud said: 'We'll stop on the way, if you like.'

'Oh, please not, Mrs Borrowdell,' he replied; 'I don't want to give you trouble; you've sure had enough trouble over me today.'

'Not a bit of it. And please call me Laura.'

'I couldn't do that, Mrs Borrowdell.'

'Well why not? I'm calling you Suns.'

'That's different.'

'Why?' she demanded, and thought, 'I'll stop him being so damn servile.'

'It is different, Mrs Borrowdell, and that's all there is to it.'

'We'll argue about that later.'

He was silent for a few miles, then said: 'Shall I see Lady Corbel again?'

'If you wish to.'

'I certainly do: I haven't thanked her for all she's done for me. I haven't seen her even: you left me in the car when you went to the hostel.'

'There was a reason,' she said, then paused before adding: 'You might as well know now—better than finding out for yourself. But some hotels have a colour bar. It's shameful, ridiculous, and disgusting, but that one has. A lot of American tourists stay there, you see. Don't put all the blame on us. Some places are like that—some people too. Not people like Aunt Janet or Jack or me, and there's another thing, Suns—don't get angry with people if they seem patronizing, and assume that you only understand baby talk.' She stopped there, conscious of the recurrent temptation to use over-simplified language herself when talking to him. It was absurd and unnatural—it wasn't *her*. She never behaved like that with other personable young men, even when they were foreigners with an imperfect command of English; and Suns wasn't a foreigner; he was a British subject—damn! that was old fashioned if you like: a British *citizen*; one, moreover, who spoke English as well as she did—rather more carefully and correctly, perhaps, with a slight American lilt that suited his deep, melodious voice. Glancing sideways at him, she caught the white flash of a smile.

'I'll remember,' he promised.

From the moment she had met him at the Immigration Office, he felt that everything was out of his hands. For the time being he could give his self-confidence a rest. He didn't need it; she was in charge, speaking and acting with an easy, unassailable authority, more like a man than a woman; but she hadn't a hint of that wounding air of superiority, that damn-you-get-out-of-my-way attitude of so many white women he'd met on the island. She was infinitely kind and considerate, with something more positively personal in her kindness than Lady Corbel's gentle interest and thoughtfulness: something frighteningly possessive. He had never imagined a white woman like this, or any woman, for that matter. She seemed to say everything that came into her mind, and then she was so different to look at from most white women, with her glowing

olive skin, a body that made him think of Julie, and those large brown eyes.

She'd explained everything so easily and competently to the Immigration officials. Told them about Jack's offer of a job, and how she and Lady Corbel were prepared to be responsible for Suns till he got started. Then she borrowed their office telephone, called an hotel she knew in Clifton, made reservations for Janet and Mavis, asked for advice about taxi firms, ordered a car for them, and saw them into it and on their way. She had offered hospitality at her home, but Janet explained that Mavis couldn't accept it because she had to be in or near Bristol where Marshall's body would eventually be taken. (Janet didn't add that Mavis would refuse to be one of a party which included 2 Negro.) Suns had sat on a wooden bench near a stove in a draughty waiting-room until Laura had time to collect him. She drove him from Avonmouth docks to Bristol through a steady drizzle of chilling rain, gave him a late lunch at a busy pub where they stayed till closing time and afterwards bought him a much needed overcoat off the peg, and a pair of woollen gloves. Then they went to the hotel at Clifton, where the doorman said to Suns, 'Just a minute, sir,' and asked Laura if he might speak to her for a moment inside. When they'd passed through the revolving doors out of earshot, he said: 'I'm sorry, madam, but we don't admit coloured people to this hotel.'

Even when seething with rage, Laura never exploded to the wrong person. 'Thank you for telling me,' she said quietly; 'I'll ask my friend to wait in the car.'

The doorman made an embarrassed throat noise, then asked if she'd mind driving the car to the hotel car park, or at least a few yards up the road.

'Yes I would,' she said, and now her voice had a cutting edge; 'it's more convenient for me where it is—d'you expect me to traipse around in the rain to suit your convenience?'

'I have an umbrella, madam.'

She rocked him back on his heels by saying: 'And you know what you can do with it. That's enough. The car stays there, and if your manager complains because my friend's in it, you tell him that I shall be having a few words with him before I leave.'

She didn't explain to Suns—just opened the car door and asked him to wait. Then she went up to the suite where Janet and Mavis were comfortably settled, made sure that they were satisfied with everything, and chatted for a few minutes before taking her leave of them. Back in the entrance hall, she went to the reception desk and asked to see the manager. She was told he wasn't available.

'What the hell does that mean?' she demanded.

'He's resting,' admitted the dignified reception clerk, whose hair-do was a blonde version of a guardsman's bearskin.

'Be kind enough to tell him that Mrs Borrowdell wishes to see him immediately,' she said; 'he'll know the name.'

Within minutes the manager arrived: an oily little man in a formal black coat and waistcoat and striped trousers with a white carnation in his buttonhole, all rather too spruce and snappy, and suggesting the turn-out of an old-fashioned stock-broker setting forth on a honeymoon. He interviewed her at the reception desk instead of inviting her to his office; a mistake he regretted later.

'My husband thinks very highly of this hotel,' she began, 'and that's why I chose it for Lady Corbel and Mrs Semple.'

He gave her a stock smile. 'I'm delighted, Mrs Borrowdell,' he said; 'we had the *great* pleasure of accommodating the delegates to that conference Mr Borrowdell held here last year. Yes, indeed. And we have a provisional booking for another in October this year.'

'So I believe. But of course it'll be cancelled.'

'Oh, dear. I *am* sorry to hear that, especially as Mr Borrow-

dell was so *satisfied* with the arrangements. Does that mean he's holding the conference in some other locality? He was so *very* pleased with Clifton.'

'Oh, no. He'll probably hold it in Clifton, but at some other hotel, for he can't possibly use this one again.'

'May I ask why not?'

'You may. Some delegates from Ghana may be attending, and I'm told you have a colour-bar here.'

'Well—er, the hotel is not available for coloured people.'

'That sort of bloody nonsense is going to lose you a lot of business in future: it's lost you a conference already.'

'I'm sorry, but we do *have* this rule. You see, so many Americans are our guests.'

'Bugger the Americans!'

The manager almost jumped with shock, and glanced furtively round the hall. One or two people were standing about, straining to hear what was said. 'I—I beg your pardon,' he twittered.

'I said *bugger the Americans!*' Laura repeated. 'Who's running this country, anyway? This is Clifton, England, not Little Rock, Arkansas.'

'But, Mrs Borrowdell, please, we have to consider our guests.'

'Are you trying to tell me that all your guests are uncivilized yahoos?'

'No—no, certainly not.'

'Only some of them, perhaps?'

'Really, Mrs Borrowdell—I, I don't know *what* to say.'

'I bet you don't! Your rule, as you call it, is indefensible balls and as out-of-date as your furniture. I *do* know what to say—and I'll say it to everybody I meet who may be thinking of staying here.'

Although Laura had not raised her voice much, her audience now included many more people than the manager and the reception clerks. They were disappointed when she closed the

proceedings by saying: 'And now I want a trunk call to London, please,' and gave the receptionist Jack's number. When she got through she talked only about Suns. The rest could wait; but she knew Jack wouldn't hesitate to switch that conference to another hotel.

'I've got to make things easy for him,' she was thinking, as the big car devoured the miles; 'he's got to have confidence.'

How different his reception would be in France—but then the French were the most highly civilized people in Europe—in the world for that matter. A Negro could feel at home there: he was accepted just like any other man. None of this maddening condescension, and she'd got to be damned careful that she didn't fall into that one herself.

She had an impulse to stop at Cheltenham for dinner, but got the better of it: she might run into that Clifton business again, and she wasn't going to risk that. So she drove through the broad spacious shopping streets of the town, past the pale cream Regency buildings of the outskirts, and out, by Cleeve Hill, following the long valley and through the winding street of Winchcombe to Broadway. The night had become fine and clear. The big car sang quietly up Broadway Hill, and as they sped along the ridge road towards Chipping Campden, the moon shone brightly.

Soon they slowed down to pass through a gateway flanked by square pillars, then down a short avenue to an open gravelled court, the massive walls of a tall stone house rising on three sides of it, gleaming like wet silver in the moonlight, with one side lost in shadow.

'And here we are, Suns,' said Laura. 'Here's your real welcome to England.' And thought to herself how corny it sounded. Oh well—she might just as well make it cornier still, so she added: 'Welcome to Doveridge Manor.'

SEVEN

Laura and Jack lived in untroubled comfort at Doveridge Manor. The house was run for them by two elderly women, identical twins named Thraddle; unmarried, competent, always calm, unperturbed by anything that happened, and devoted to the Borrowdells. They came with the Manor house when Jack bought it, having been in service since they were girls with the previous owner, the exacting and eccentric Sir Temple Sheenley, fifth baronet of that name, who at the age of ninety-two went to his infernal rest, as his long-deprived heir sourly observed. Doveridge Manor, sold to meet the death duties, came into the market just when Jack and Laura were looking for a large country house.

The Thraddle twins were so alike that even Laura sometimes confused Dorothy with Doris—Jack called them Dis and Dat—but they never minded being mixed up, and between them carried the whole burden of housekeeping. When there was a full house, which often happened at week-ends, Dis and Dat hired extra staff, sending as far as Evesham for additional help; all Jack and Laura had to do was pay, and they never grugged the money. (The expense accounts took care of the cost anyway.) The twins had once been round-faced, rosy-cheeked blondes; now with russet complexions and silvery hair they were still attractive, with blue eyes that shone gaily. When they spoke they used formal, old-fashioned phrases; when they smiled, the world seemed a brighter place.

'I can't think why you never married,' Laura had once said to Doris, who answered: 'We managed, madam,' whatever that meant.

It was Dorothy (the eldest by twenty-five minutes) who took charge of Suns, showed him to his bedroom where a fire of apple wood glowed in the grate, opened the door of the adjoining bathroom, and said: 'I trust you'll be comfortable, sir, and if there is anything you want, let me know if you please.'

Suns felt slightly overwhelmed. He'd never been called 'sir' in his life before, nor surrounded by such luxury. A table clock in an ebony case chimed as the hands on the gilt face recorded half past eight. 'We're having cold things to eat as soon as you're ready,' Laura had said, as Dorothy led the way upstairs. He felt ready now; so he washed, ran a comb through his thick hair, and went down to the lofty hall, that ascended through three storeys to the roof, and was the oldest part of the house. A small table near the fireplace was laid for two. A row of bottles and decanters stood on a long oak dresser, with glasses on the shelves above.

Laura had changed from her pale grey tweed coat and skirt into skin-tight, ankle-length scarlet slacks and a white woollen sweater. She looked as if she had nothing else on. She hadn't. Her small bare feet were thrust into red slippers lined with white fur.

'Sherry, gin, Scotch, Rye, Bourbon?' she offered.

'I'd better use a soft drink, Mrs Borrowdell. May I have a tomato juice?'

'A Bloody Mary would warm you up more than plain tomato juice.'

'What's she trying to do to me?' he wondered; aloud he said: 'What's a Bloody Mary?'

'Tomato juice and vodka.'

'Better not, Mrs Borrowdell.'

'What are you afraid of—and for God's sake stop calling me Mrs Borrowdell. If you won't call me Laura, don't call me anything.' Then she was immediately contrite: she'd started to bully him. 'Sorry,' she went on; 'I didn't mean to snap you up

like that.' And she laughed. 'I do believe that you're frightened of me—look, Suns, you mustn't be.'

He laughed, happy with a sudden surge of new knowledge. When such revelations had come to him before, he'd felt as though a curtain had been pulled aside to disclose an aspect of life he'd known nothing about till that moment. The first had occurred when he was nine, and realized that as he could remember anything without effort, including many things he'd only casually overheard, such a gift would cut his school work in half. Boy-like, he was thrilled by the discovery, but the wisdom that came with it was mature beyond his years: he knew that remembering wasn't enough, that he'd got to understand as well and must never be satisfied with parroted knowledge. The second revelation came when he was barely fifteen and he'd had his first girl, which opened up such a vista of pleasure that he could think of nothing else till his common sense rescued him, and he caught up with the work that would take him to Jamesport University on a scholarship. He'd only wasted a month. The third followed the celebrations with his class-mates after he'd taken his degree a few years later, and everybody got tight on rum. He never got tight again. And soon, very soon, he grasped the secret of selling: he must sell his way through life, and not be content to take any old job that came along just to earn spending money. Friends like Smokey Fernand played around, never thought ahead, quarrelled with their bread-and-butter, and generally made a hash of things. Not for Suns, that happy-go-lucky sort of muddling; lucky he might be, but he backed his luck with work, and by the time he'd landed the office job at Vega, he had begun to master the art of identifying the right strings to pull.

And now, something in Laura's voice had jerked the curtain aside once more, and with devastating clarity he saw that white women were just like other chicks. The simplicity as well as the significance of this last revelation prompted his laughter, and

cracked open the integument of shyness, reserve, and apprehension that, since the moment he met Laura, had imprisoned his natural ease. For the first time he looked directly at her, and saw something in her eyes that he didn't understand. It reflected an emotion that she didn't understand herself.

When he laughed he had opened his mouth wide and, framed by his splendid teeth, was an enormous tongue. 'Like an animal's,' Laura thought, and was bitterly ashamed of her instinctive repugnance. She tried to exorcise it, but couldn't. A physical barrier had arisen between them; racial prejudice had materialized in a way that defeated intelligence.

She insisted to herself that it was strange, that was all, *strange*. Such *strange* differences could be exciting; but she was repelled, not excited. When she gave him his drink—and he accepted a Bloody Mary—she saw the beauty of his hands, *but* the palms were pale pink, and she had expected them to be the same dark plummy brown of his face and fingers. In shape and strength his fingers could have belonged to a mediaeval craftsman. Beautiful hands—if you ignored those simian palms. 'Have I got a private colour-bar of my own?' she asked herself in savage disgust. He broke into her troubled thoughts by saying: 'Mrs Borrowdell—please, am I drinking alone?'

She smiled at him, then spooned ice cubes into a tall glass and filled it to the brim with Scotch. She raised it, spilling a little, for her hand shook. 'To your happiness in England,' she toasted him, and downed half the drink in one gulp.

He raised his glass. 'Thanks for your real kindness,' he said, taking a small sip.

'That's no good, Suns,' she protested. 'You should knock it back in one, and then have another.'

'Back home we drink to those not there,' he said.

'Here we say absent friends.'

He nodded. 'I was thinking of Lady Corbel,' he said. 'I owe her a lot.'

'So do I—let's both drink to her.'

This time Suns finished his drink. She poured him another, and refilled her own glass. 'Let's eat,' she suggested, 'and I'll tell you a few things about English drinks.' And over an ample meal of cold chicken and ham and salad, cheese and fruit, she enlarged on the drinks you could trust, how far you could go with some, and what should never be mixed, feeling absurdly like a school-mistress—a feeling accentuated by the grave attention of her pupil who remembered every word she said, which was just as well, for his own experience was bounded by beer and rum.

They drank coffee in a small oak panelled parlour that opened off the hall, cheered by blazing logs in a stone fireplace with a canopy which rose to the beamed ceiling.

'Say when you want to go to bed, and go just when you feel like it,' said Laura, when he'd lit a cigarette.

'Don't you smoke, Mrs Borrowdell?'

'I never have. Look, Suns, if you're tired, say straight out, won't you? I never want more than six hours of sleep myself, but I expect you want more, and we must make an early start tomorrow. I shall have to drive you to Moreton-in-Marsh to catch the fast train to Paddington.' Oh, for God's sake, why am I babbling on like this? If I'm not telling him what he ought to do and ought not to do, I'm just being a bloody bore. Snap out of it, woman!

'Got a girl friend?' she asked.

He nodded.

'Tell me about her.' That should get him going, she thought. It didn't.

'Julie—well, Julie's just my girl,' he said, and seemed inclined to leave it at that. He was thinking that Julie out of her clothes looked very like Mrs Borrowdell in what she was wearing right now, though Julie wasn't so tall. Both had full, shapely breasts, and buttocks that sprang high up from the small of the

back in arrogant curves. And she flirted her tail just like Julie did. How much of a white woman was she? In the island they'd have said she was passing for white.

Laura was persistent. 'And do you make love?' she wanted to know.

'Sure we do.'

She left her chair and plumped herself down on the hearth-rug, her legs tucked under her, looking up at him as he sat in a high-backed wing chair. 'Tell me,' she invited. Something of the hoyden, the overgrown schoolgirl revealed itself, and made those evocative words seem innocent and artless.

'I love Julie very much,' he said, speaking slowly. That seemed the safest thing to say, as some of his former apprehensions threatened to return. Julie's words came back to him; he could hear the anxious tremor in her soft voice when she'd said: 'You won't tangle with no white girls, will you, Suns?' He recalled his light-hearted reassurance that white girls looked half-cooked to him. But this one didn't—not this warm-skinned lovely smiling up at him. Watch it, man! You could be a fool! Better tell her he was tired and wanted to sleep.

A long silence. A tall clock in a corner of the room, after a husky preliminary noise, as if clearing its throat, struck ten.

Then Laura said: 'I like your hands, Suns. May I make a drawing of them?'

So this was it: they always got around to his hands.

It was Laura's favourite opening gambit, unless a man's hands were fat or ugly. She never suspected how common it was. A later move, 'I'm really a simple girl,' came when she'd taken her clothes off—an assertion refuted by everything that followed. But all this was some way ahead; she wasn't going to rush matters and have him scared again. Meanwhile she must get used to the pale palms of those strong, sensitive hands. She fetched a sketching block, soft pencils, and some sticks of charcoal, and posed him with his hands resting on his knees. To

attain this formal attitude and arrange his hands to her liking, she had to touch them. His skin was warm and smooth, and as their hands met he had exposed that lolling tongue in another laugh, and again a wave of aversion submerged her reason. She must fight her way to the surface, or she'd drown in prejudices she hated and despised. Unless she did, she'd betray everything she stood for, and always be haunted by a sense of guilt.

He watched her while she worked intently. 'There,' she said at length, and showed him her bold, crisp drawing. His hands seemed to leap out from the paper.

'You're clever all right, Mrs Borrowdell,' he said.

'I love drawing—as an architect I don't have as much time for it as I'd like.'

He took the sketch and studied it. 'They're my hands, sure,' he said; 'but they're not that colour.'

'I'm interested in form—not colour. I wanted to get the shape of your hands right.'

'Julie tells me I have kind hands,' he said, and wondered what had prompted him to say just that.

'She should know if you're lovers.'

'Yes,' he assented, flatly. This was the moment to announce his increasing sleepiness. He stood up, and so did Laura. For a moment they faced each other, both indecisive. 'Everything I believe in is at stake,' Laura was telling herself; but she'd never made love as a cold duty, and although Suns was maddeningly attractive with all the latent promise of a splendid body, the thought of ardent caresses from those pink palms was unbearable.

Her sense of the ridiculous came to the rescue. What was it the fox-hunting, horse-faced county family girls were told by their mothers? Something about doing their duty, shutting their eyes, and thinking of England? She'd have to shut her eyes and think of the United Nations, if she slept with Suns as a matter of duty.

It never occurred to her that Suns might be embarrassed and reluctant.

'I'm very tired, Mrs Borrowdell,' he said at length.

She sighed. 'I shall never get you to call me Laura, I can see that,' she mourned. 'I expect you *are* tired. It's been quite a day. I'll come up and see that you've got everything you want.'

'This is the last chance you'll have,' she told herself, as they ascended the stairs.

She glanced round his bedroom, put a couple of logs on the dying fire, and caught a reflection of Suns in the looking glass that stood on the dressing table. He was yawning. A vast cavern had opened. That tongue. *No! no! no!* shrieked every prejudice.

She pulled herself together with an effort. 'Good-night, Suns,' she said. 'Sleep well.'

'Good-night, Mrs Borrowdell, and thank you again for all you've done for me.'

She walked away along the corridor, heard the key click as he locked the bedroom door, and was humbled by the sense of relief which followed that decisive sound. There was no mistake about who had made the decision.

SALESMAN'S CIRCUS

ONE

Jack Borrowdell sat behind his large mahogany desk in an old-fashioned swivel chair. The furnishing of his office was uncompromisingly Victorian, intentionally so, because he knew that such staid comfort disarmed the resistance of industrialists whose suspicion of his kind of research work was usually matched by their ignorance of its uses. There were a few unobtrusive concessions to the twentieth century: double-glazed windows reduced the traffic noises of Victoria Street to a smothered hum; central heating kept the room at a cosy temperature in winter, supplemented by a small fire of smokeless fuel, more for show than warmth; and in summer an air-conditioning unit cooled the place. Internal and external telephones stood on the desk, both instruments in two tones of grey, also a cut-glass ash-tray, a silver cigarette box, a grey-bound desk diary, a blotting-pad and a note-pad—nothing else: it was a tidy desk. The floor was covered from wall to wall by a deep pile carpet of dark grey. The window curtains were dark blue velvet. Some early nineteenth-century engravings of London street scenes, framed in dull silver, adorned the dove grey walls. The sedate colouring, like the solid mahogany furniture, suggested quiet and respectable efficiency; nothing aggressive or strident.

Laura had designed that interior. Jack specified his needs and wasn't prepared to argue. 'These are your terms of reference,' he'd said: 'my office has to go down with characters who like "good stoof thick". Anything contemporary is *out*.'

Laura's own business sense prevented her from wasting his time or her own. 'Yes, I know you're dealing with Philistines,' she agreed; 'and they're easily scared. Well, darling, it mustn't

be as tasteless as a doctor's consulting room or as scruffy as a lawyer's den; so we'll fall back on the days of the dear old Queen, and be comfortable, safe, and unexciting—just like her.'

She gave his office an atmosphere that not only created confidence, but invited confidences. Insensitive realists from the Midlands and the North felt at home there, unaware that their prejudices had been softened up by those carefully contrived surroundings. But the place had quite a different effect on Suns, who compared it unfavourably with Mr Franchet's efficient-looking, streamlined office at Vega. He sat in a leather-covered armchair while Jack asked him questions.

So this was the man who owned a woman who acted like she was willing to be anybody's woman. Man, am I well out of *that*! Am I glad I locked that bedroom door. This one would have known *everything*. His eyes went straight into you, found out what went on inside—no, you could never cover up with *him*. He was the boss, and when he was around his woman would step right down from the boss class herself, and acknowledge that he was THE ONE WHO. Those three words had a world of meaning for Suns, his family, all his friends. THE ONE WHO was the wielder of power, the taker of decisions, listened to, respected, even obeyed. Suns knew that if he'd stayed with his family he would eventually have been THE ONE WHO. They had lost the other candidate when his eldest brother Tom became a policeman.

Jack intended to treat Suns exactly as he would treat anybody else he was going to employ, but found this embarrassingly difficult. He could read nothing from this man's opaque brown eyes, which seemed expressionless, though Suns was obviously alert and attentive.

'So your name's Suns Alpy, that right?' he began.

'That's correct, sir.'

'Were you christened Suns—I ask, because it's an unusual name and I've never come across it before.'

'I was christened Saul; but my mother took against that, and got to calling me Suns—short for Sunshine, because she said I was always smiling.'

'The surname of Alpy is new to me: I've not heard it before.'

'Comes from Alpion, sir. My great-great-grandfather was a plantation hand—a slave, owned by a sugar planter named Alpion. Fergus Alpion was one of the big rich men of the island, and a real good man. He treated his people well. Built a church for them—it's still there, just outside Jamesport—taught the quick ones to read, and allowed them to marry, though that was illegal then and for a long time afterwards. A parson could get into a heap of trouble if he married a coloured couple. Teaching coloured people to read was illegal, too. But then anything's legal if you're rich enough—Fergus Alpion, he knew that all right.'

'Do *you* believe that?'

'Isn't it so?'

'Not here, and certainly not *now*,' Jack assured him. What a background, he thought, then said: 'Please go on.'

'That's more than a hundred years ago,' Suns continued. 'My great-great-grandfather was smart—one of the quick ones, and he was made head-man of the plantation. He was called Alpion's man—for he hadn't any name of his own except Josiah—and that was shortened to Alpy's man, and his sons were called Alpy's folk, and the name's been ours ever since. There are lots of Alpy's in the island.'

'I see.' He should revert to the original name, Jack reflected; Alpy sounded like a pop singer, Suns was worse; together they were impossible. Wait a minute, though; wouldn't they get acceptance for him in field work? Well, leave that for the moment. 'Tell me all about yourself and your family,' he invited.

Suns, the youngest of eight children, had four brothers and three sisters. Two of his sisters were married, his youngest sister, Sophie, had left home and nobody knew where she was,

what she was doing, nor apparently bothered much. There seemed to be an amiable casualness about family affection. Sophie had walked out of their lives; they accepted the fact, and, without ceasing to care for her, did nothing about finding her. ('She'll come back one day and tell us about it,' Suns said, and left it at that.) His eldest brother was now a police sergeant in Jamesport; two others, who were twins, made good money playing in the steel band of the Blue Candle—a posh restaurant and night-club in the hills above Jamesport; the one nearest him in age was a waiter in a luxury hotel near Spaniard's Inlet. His father drove a taxi for the Jamesport branch of Fernand's hire business. Suns could have gone into that business; but he was different from the rest of his family. He saw education as the escape route from a life where you took orders and never gave them; so he'd applied himself with the tenacity of a Scotsman to learning, making the most of his phenomenal memory, winning a scholarship that took him to Jamesport University, where he read history and economics and took a first class honours degree. The way was open for the teaching profession; but he never even considered it.

'That I didn't want,' he told Jack; 'you don't get places, you don't make big money, you stay put—doing the same lot over and over. Not for me.'

His ambitions, hitherto undefined, began to take shape. He read scores of dull books about commerce and industry, mostly American, and so ill-written that they seemed like clumsy translations from German. He spent money on a correspondence course in salesmanship, and learnt a few things that Jack decided he'd better unlearn fairly soon, though he didn't say so. His story was one of small successes, and he told it without any smugness, perhaps because he was conscious of the element of anti-climax in so many of those small successes; they were too small, never took him as far as he'd hoped, and were almost as disappointing as the set-backs—and he'd had a lot of those,

too. Even when he got that good job at the sugar-mill, he soon saw that it was a dead-end. He could never become manager, unless he stayed there till the island had independence, and he was favoured by legislation which might displace white men. He began to think the island was too small for him; though he was neither boastful nor arrogant when he told Jack that; lots of men and girls he knew had gone to England, though not many troubled to write home to say how they liked it there. He wanted more out of life and certainly saw more in life than his father and mother and brothers and sisters; though he didn't feel scornfully superior or disapprove of their limited satisfactions. He wanted something different; feeling instinctively—though he didn't put this into words—that he belonged to the boss class.

Jack found himself speculating about Suns' ancestry. He might well be a reincarnation of that competent great-great-grandfather who had managed his master's plantation, or a throw-back to some tribal chief, caught by slavers, shipped from Africa, and tough enough to survive the rigours of the Middle Passage. Unlike the Africans who were seeping into England, the West Indians were generations away from their tribal origins; in common with American Negroes, they had nothing but harsh memories of past oppression and an everyday experience of rejection or indifference. Most of them had a chip on their shoulders—but not Suns.

A chip on the shoulder was incompatible with self confidence. Although he wore it lightly, there was no doubt about Suns' self-confidence, and Jack had no doubt either about his ambitions and his determination to realize them. He could sense latent ability, a capacity for concentration, and deduced a readiness to sacrifice leisure, though Suns was too well-balanced to become one of those 'hungry young men' T.G. was always coveting as ideal executive material. Jack knew those hungry young men, whose appetite for money, power, and status generated a

demoniac energy which drove them to dedicate their waking lives to work and playing office politics while mouthing insufferable twaddle about 'teamwork' and 'togetherness'. At fifty they were either neurotic or alcoholic, big ulcer men or high-pressure bores: sometimes the lot. They had money, power, and prestige—and nothing else.

No Negro would pay *that* price. Jack felt certain of that; and yet, he asked himself, how *could* he be certain. This was pure hunch: he had no knowledge of Negroes, and for that matter how much did anybody know about the men and women who came to England from all over Africa and the Caribbean islands; that dark, hopeful stream, swelling in volume each year? One thing was certain: Negroes believed that life was for living and time something to be spent, not saved, an attitude which could diminish their sense of responsibility or give them a different interpretation of responsibility. Also they seemed happy people, with better manners than their hosts—hosts, that word was a give-away if you like. We aren't their hosts, Jack reminded himself; they're here for keeps; not just temporary guests. He and his fellow-countrymen had better stop generalizing about them, because Negroes were fellow-countrymen too. He was humiliated by his ignorance. He couldn't even distinguish between Africans and West Indians, yet they must be as distinctive as Scots and Welsh. Well, he was going to look into the market these new fellow-countrymen of his represented. Aunt Janet's stowaway had happened along at the right moment. That reminded him.

'Why did you decide to jump a passage instead of paying for one?' he asked. 'You said you'd saved some money.'

'I wanted that money,' said Suns quite frankly. 'I didn't want to come here with nothing.' He hesitated. Should he tell Mr Borrowdell that he had something to fall back on? Yes—he felt sure Mr Borrowdell wouldn't act mean about it. 'I saved over two hundred pounds,' he admitted. He told Jack how he'd

transferred the money to a bank in London. At Jack's invitation he described how he'd planned his free passage, how Smokey had smuggled his suitcase aboard, with the help and full knowledge of the crew; how he'd joined the loading teams, and got aboard while Smokey slipped ashore, though nearly everything had gone wrong because of the row over the drunken American woman who'd delayed the ship. He was glad to find Lady Corbel was a passenger. Finally, he'd been lucky.

Jack regarded him thoughtfully. 'It's not all luck,' he said. 'O.K., Suns—you'll do. I'll take you on as a trainee first of all, so we can see whether you'll measure up to a job I have in mind.'

'What job, Mr Borrowdell?'

'Not sure what to call it yet. Meanwhile you'll spend six months seeing what we do here, how and why we do it, and you'll learn a lot. You'll have a nominal salary as a trainee—six hundred and fifty a year. I'll fix your accommodation. Agreed?'

'When do I start?'

'Now.' Jack picked up the house telephone and asked for Andy Mulgrove.

TWO

'Damn it, Andy, I do expect a psychologist to be able to tell me something about a man, whether he's black, white, or yellow.' Jack Borrowdell replenished Andy Mulgrove's glass as he made this protest. 'You're supposed to keep an eye on personnel,' he continued, 'and this man's been with us for over six weeks now.'

'And I know sweet F.A. about how his mind works or what goes on in it,' Andy confessed. 'I know that he has a good brain, a staggering memory for facts and figures, and he's quick on the uptake. I also know that he's serious, perhaps earnest is a better word, without being a prig, and he hasn't put a foot wrong. He's a quiet, determined go-getter, but I don't think he'll go after getting, if you follow me.'

'You think he'll be loyal to the people who gave him his start?' Jack smiled at his own question. How easily one dropped into the conventional employers' way of looking at people. Loyalty was always unpredictable: a hampering virtue to an ambitious man, and one that he'd ditched early in his own career. He'd be waffling about 'the team' presently, like old man T.G.

Andy drank some whisky and began to fill his pipe. He'd been invited to come back that Friday evening to Jack's flat, ostensibly for a drink, though he knew Jack was going to spring something on him. When an irritable querulousness replaced his normal, bantering good humour, that generally meant something was going to be changed, and somebody made uncomfortable by a bright piece of reorganization that Jack had thought up, decided on, and would put through with a brisk

disregard for those it would affect. It was nearly seven o'clock; outside a dispiriting drizzle was carrying on memories of a cheerless April into an unpromising May. Andy was depressed by the prospect of combating or arguing about whatever Jack was preparing to bring out of the hat; and Jack was feeling depressed too, for he had been reminded that he was not entirely his own master. Normally on a Friday night he'd be on his way to Doveridge, where Laura had already gone, direct from one of her jobs in Birmingham; but T.G., with the indifference to other people's convenience that denotes the tycoon, was flying from New York, and there was to be a command performance at the Savoy tomorrow for Jack and all his executives. Actually, they would be the audience; the performance would be given by T.G. himself. His urge to give a 'pep' talk rose periodically, like a boil. After pondering for several days about nothing, he would dredge some platitudes from the shallows of his mind, then cast about for an audience. He hadn't been in London for more than a year. About time the boys over there heard from him direct. Nothing like personal contact.

As Jack watched Andy light his pipe, an impish idea suddenly dispelled his depression. He liked it so well, that he hardly heard Andy saying, judicially: 'Well, I don't know about loyalty—that's a bit dated, isn't it?'

'To hell with loyalty; anybody can buy it if they have the price. Look, Andy, can you get hold of Suns right away? I'm going to bring him along tomorrow to meet T.G.'

Andy was never surprised by any of Jack's inspirations. 'All right,' he said; 'I'll call the office—he may be there——'

'If he isn't, get hold of him somehow or other. This'll do T.G. a world of good. Shake up the old bastard's ulcers. I've always suspected him of being a member of the John Birch Society or the Ku-Klux-Klan or something.'

Andy grinned, picked up the telephone, and dialled. The night line was put through to Jack's private office, and after a

few minutes Suns answered, saying correctly: 'Researchers-United, can I help you?'

'Still around, eh, Suns?'

'Why, yes, Mr Mulgrove. But I was just going to leave.'

'Have a word with Mr Borrowdell first.' Andy handed the instrument to Jack who took it and said: 'Be at the Savoy at twelve-thirty tomorrow and ask for Mr Golantly's suite. I want you to meet the chief. If you've anything else on, put it off.'

'Of course, Mr Borrowdell.'

'Right—that's it. Good-night.'

'Good-night, and thank you, Mr Borrowdell.'

'What's he want you for?' asked the tall, lithe red-head who had followed him into Jack's office when he went to answer the 'phone. He told her, and she sniffed. 'That would have to happen.' She sounded disappointed and angry. 'If I'd taken the call, I'd have told him you'd gone.'

'If *you'd* taken the call he'd have wanted to know what you were doing at this hour on a Friday when the office quits at five-thirty.'

'I'm a secretary, aren't I? I was tidying up my boss's desk and papers.'

'That's one way of describing it.'

'Suns, you are *awful*. But it *is* a shame about tomorrow afternoon.'

'We got this evening, haven't we?'

'Yes, but Sheila won't have gone off for her week-end.'

Suns knew that she was a one-idea woman. He smiled and said: 'Then you shouldn't share a flat. I guess you're always around too, when she has a date with her boy friend.'

'We don't get in each other's way.'

'Then you aren't normal women.'

'Funny, aren't you?'

Suns laughed at her. 'What's wrong with tomorrow morning, Jenny? You tell me, honey.'

Jenny Lamprey, who was secretary to Neston, the chief industrial psychologist, pondered a moment. 'If you like,' she agreed; 'but Sheila won't leave till ten, and the flat'll be in a mess.'

'We can do some more tidying.'

She snuggled up to him. 'You're such a solemn boy in the office, Suns,' she said; 'but you do make me laugh.'

He kissed her perfunctorily. 'How about going somewhere to dance after we eat?' he suggested.

'I'd love that. Let's go to the Palais de Dance at Hammer-smith. There's always a good band on there.'

'By the way, Andy,' said Jack; 'reverting to the subject of what you do and do not know about Suns, how does he go down with the staff generally?'

'He's popular. Everybody calls him Suns, and I think they look on him as a kind of pet.'

'That's just the sort of bloody condescension I was afraid he'd run into.'

'It isn't conscious condescension: there's genuine affection for him.' Andy paused, then added: 'He has a bit of trouble fending off Archi Neston, but he does it nicely without hurting Archi's feelings.'

'Blast Archi's feelings. I'd fire that bloody pansy if you weren't always putting up such a song and dance about his being indispensable. Nobody's indispensable. But apart from that, is there any sign of sex breaking surface?'

'Not in the office, anyway.'

'But he must *have* a sex life. You're pretty damn disappointing as a psychologist if you haven't had a pry into that.'

'Maybe he has outside the office. But I've told you, Jack, I know very little about him. I saw him settled into the bed-sitter we fixed for him at Mother Hurst's, and asked young Turnbull to help him find his way about London. But I've no idea how he spends his time out of the office.'

'He doesn't mix with other coloured people, I can tell you that,' said Jack, helping himself to another Scotch and splashing soda into the glass. 'But, like you, I really know little about him, and it *has* crossed my mind that there may not be very much to know. He has a streak of innocence—something quite different from simple-mindedness.'

'I'm aware of the distinction.'

'Yes—but you'd tart it up in fancy pants. Trick-cyclists can't bear plain statements about minds and characters.'

'You want the best jargon: we have it. We'd never get acceptance without it. D'you think the toughies who call us in to advise about industrial relations and management would wear us if we didn't blind 'em with science?'

'You know I don't agree with that. If I didn't correct the impression you boys make, and let our clients think they're doing something ordinary and obvious and sensible, we'd lose every scrap of business that comes from north of Birmingham. But about Archi Neston——' He paused. 'Here it comes,' thought Andy; 'this is what he's been leading up to.' Jack continued: 'I know it's unreasonable, but homos give me the creeps.'

'At least Archi's honest about it.'

'Oh, yes—I've heard him say often enough that what was good enough for the Greeks is good enough for him.'

'Well, we're only about eighty generations away from Plato, and the Greeks did know a thing or two. Leave his private life out of it, Jack. Archi Neston's the best man we've ever had on this job, and he's not obviously a homo. I should be in a hell of a mess without him—especially just now.'

'You may find yourself in a hell of a mess, then. I don't like this business with Suns.'

'Oh, for God's sake, Jack. It's just a flash in the pan. Archi has his own settled domestic arrangements. Suns is a new sensation, and Archi needs an emotional flutter now and then:

who doesn't? His wife or husband, or however you like to describe the character he lives with, is as jealous as hell, and would have non-stop hysteria and refuse to run the home if matters went beyond a mild flirtation. I must say I admire Archi's frankness about his recreations.'

'He has to be looking over his shoulder all the time.'

'Well, don't heterosexuals as well? They have to keep an eye lifted for husbands.' And *that* is easily the biggest damn fool thing I've said in years, Andy reflected. He glanced at Jack who didn't bat an eyelid.

'The police aren't interested in complaints from cuckolds,' he answered. 'They want spicier game—particularly if it has a reputation to lose. Artists and actors preferred, but intellectuals and politicians always acceptable. You know the sort of thing that hits the news: world-famous philosopher, allegations by milkman. It's so commonplace in the Church that it hardly rates half a column, let alone banner headlines. But an industrial psychologist would break new ground, and lose us clients.'

Andy groaned. 'Oh, dear God, you're not going to get serious over all this, are you, Jack?'

'Like hell I am.'

'This bloody Negro is going to come expensive if you give Archi the old heave-ho. Why not fire Suns instead?'

'Because he's the spearhead of a new idea, and this business lives on ideas.'

'Is that the only reason why you'd hang on to him and let Neston go?'

'Yes. Honestly, Andy, my own personal prejudices don't come into this at all. I'm thinking of the business.'

'Well, if you're thinking of the business, you just can't do this to my part of it. If you knew what's piling up—'

'I know *everything* that's going through—don't you worry about that. You can get by. Ring up Neston and tell him I don't want him at the Savoy tomorrow. No point in

introducing him to T.G. if he's not going to be around after next week.'

'I wish I'd never mentioned that Archi had an eye on Suns.'

'D'you think I didn't know? I only asked about Suns to find out how much *you* knew. It's my job to know what goes on in the office, even if you don't.'

'I think you're taking the whole thing too seriously.'

'It's damn serious. And I've made up my mind. I'll see Neston first thing on Monday morning and give him six months salary and the bag.'

'What will you tell him?'

'That's he's getting six months salary and the bag.'

'Yes—but, look, Jack, you can't do that to a top executive.'

'Can't I? Now quit belly-aching about it, Andy. Just get on the blower to Neston and put him off for tomorrow.'

'I know what's going to happen to you,' said Andy, as he reached for the telephone. 'You're going to turn into an old bastard with a Jehovah complex, like T.G.'

THREE

Jenny Lamprey was twenty-four; an efficient and highly-paid secretary who removed the petty exasperations from day-to-day office life for Archi Neston, her exacting and temperamental boss. Temperamental and irritating though he might be, he possessed the quick, feminine perceptions of his kind; he understood women, and while often resenting their competitive powers, could be a sympathetic and wise friend. Jenny might describe him jeeringly as an old pouf, but she was fond of him. Physically, he found her tolerable; more so than most women; her unassertive, almost boyish figure never reminded him that she was an accomplished man-hunter. But lately he had thought of her as that frightful trollop. Ever since he had intercepted her glances at Suns.

Archi Neston was not, as Andy had pointed out, an obvious homosexual. No mincing fastidiousness tinged his speech; his voice, deep, rich, and convincing, could never be less than a four-figure voice, and one day might command five, for his reputation as a specialist in industrial psychology was considerable and already well established when Andy coaxed him into Researchers-United. (He was not Jack's choice.) He was of medium height, blue-eyed, with rather blunt features dominated by an aggressive nose, and tidy, but not too tidy, brown hair. He wore his clothes with the subtle inattention to sartorial detail that marks the confidence of good breeding. (The Nestons were well-connected, though seldom distinguished.) He could easily have been taken for a foreign office official, or some equally trustworthy type of high-ranking civil servant.

He shared a flat in Knightsbridge with Maurice Bocardo, an

elegant creature, ten years his junior, who looked after the housekeeping and occupied his abundant leisure with exquisite needlework—a highly rewarded skill, for his glowing panels of *petit-point* were in great demand for chair seats and backs among a few knowing antique dealers. Demand far exceeded supply, and Maurice was quietly and consistently industrious. Unlike Archi, he betrayed his inclinations by his voice, his tricks of speech and gesture, his clothes, and a tittering femininity, which endeared him to Archi but to hardly anybody else. They were extremely happy together, though when Maurice had one of his fits of suspicion and jealousy, they bickered like any married couple. He was having one that Friday evening after Archi had incautiously mentioned Jenny's pursuit of Suns.

'I believe all those avid bitches are after him,' he'd said; 'and Jenny's leading the pack. It's rather horrible.'

'I think you're rather horrible to keep on talking about him,' said Maurice, pouting; 'three week-ends running you've taken him out. And last time I had to get up at half past five, so you could start early and drive him to Stratford-on-Avon and back in one day, and I was left here alone. I wouldn't complain, my dear, but I don't know *what* to think when you keep on dragging him into the conversation.'

'Oh, don't be childish, Maurice.'

'If you're growing tired of me, I can always go.'

'That's absurd and unkind. If I can't befriend a young man of a strange race who wants to make his home here——' He broke off, exasperated at the prospect of hours of bickering. Then the telephone rang, and Andy told him of the cancelled appointment at the Savoy.

'Thank God for that,' he said, and told Maurice the good news.

'Now you're free to take *him* out if you want to,' said Maurice.

'All right. Be a fool about it. I damn well will.'

He dialled Mother Hurst's number, and Maurice burst into tears. There was no reply from Suns' extension, though he hung on for nearly five minutes hoping there would be. 'Out with that trollop,' he thought. He'd call him early in the morning, invite him to Hampton Court, give him lunch at the Mitre and show him over the Palace afterwards. He passed a long sulky evening with Maurice.

For Jenny the evening passed far too rapidly. She was too level-headed, too realistic a sensualist, to be at all worried by her growing affection for Suns. At first he had seemed no more than a novel and exciting adventure. Soon she made some humbling discoveries. He was educating her, laughing kindly at her limitations, and teaching her—delightfully, she admitted, but making her feel all the time how little she had known, and how easily she had been satisfied. She had heard that no white girl who slept with a Negro ever wanted a white man again. Now she knew why. ('It was heaven, Suns—I thought it was going on for ever,' she had gasped after the first time.) She had to revise, and indeed reverse, many of her ideas. The first casualty was the illusion that she was doing him a favour. He left her in no doubt whatever that *he* was dispensing favours, *she* was in luck, and *he* called the tune. She liked it that way, accepted the small and casual part she was playing in his life, resisted the temptation to become possessive, and lived for the transient rapture of time spent in his company. He never gave her a dull moment, always surprising her by some turn of thought or speech, and getting so much more out of life than any man or woman she'd ever known. Laughter was always round the corner. She might pride herself on being a hard-boiled cockney, but she wasn't selfish or calculating, and knew she was bound to lose him presently. She would be devastated; but he would be on the way up. Even if he hadn't spoken frankly about his ambitions, she'd have known he'd never stay put.

She was quite open with her friends about Suns, and was puzzled when some of them—even the broad-minded ones—were primly censorious.

'I don't know *how* you can do it, Jenny,' said Sheila O'Brien, who shared the flat with her. Sheila was a Dublin girl, cosily plump, with the provocative combination of black hair and bright blue eyes. She was Jenny's closest friend.

'He sends me, Sheila.'

'It isn't as if you ever ran short of men, either.'

'That's a nice bit of purring, that was!'

'But you'll not be denying that it's true.'

'I get by.'

'Yes—but you haven't got in a mess. Not yet. Jenny, that *could* happen.'

'D'you think I don't know how to take care of myself?'

'I didn't mean *that*. I meant messing up your future—your whole life.'

'You sound like a middle-aged square.'

'Seriously, Jenny, what you're doing now is quite different from having a bit of fun with a boy. I have that myself.'

'I'll say you do!'

'Yes, but this *is* different. I'm not saying that Suns isn't a nice boy; he is, but he's as different from us as a dog is from a cat. You don't even begin to know what runs through that head of his, and you never could know.'

'Maybe it's just *as* well I don't. Anyway, I'm quite happy not knowing.'

They were having a final cigarette and drinking cocoa before going to bed, after Suns had brought Jenny back in a taxi from Hammersmith to Battersea. The girls had a comfortable flat on the first floor of a converted mid-Victorian house in a road off St John's Hill. Suns had said good-night at the front gate, refusing an invitation to come in for coffee or cocoa.

'Not for me, thanks,' he said; 'Sheila doesn't like me.'

'Oh, come off it, Suns.'

He shook his head. 'She doesn't and you know it. Good-night, honey. See you tomorrow.' He kissed her, and she ran up the steps and let herself in. The hall light turned her wild curls to red gold as she looked back and waved to him.

The taxi was waiting, and when Suns gave the driver Mother Hurst's address, he spat expressively.

'Chelsea's not out of your way, is it?' Suns asked, pausing with his hand on the door.

'Get in—I'll take you,' said the driver gruffly.

The rain had stopped earlier in the evening, but the streets still glistened as they drove down St John's Hill, past Clapham Junction and the Falcon, up Lavender Hill, left at the traffic lights into Latchmere Road. Closed and darkened pubs everywhere. No lights in shops. Only a few bedroom windows glowing. Suns had not yet got over the strangeness of London's early-to-bed habits; night was something to be defeated; darkness should be driven off, or held at bay. Here they seemed to welcome it like a friend. Albert Bridge Road was empty. Reflections from the lights of Chelsea Embankment wriggled in the water as they crossed the river. There were no lights in Battersea Park opposite. Even before midnight the London that Suns knew was dying; after midnight it was quite dead.

The taxi drew up at the large private hotel in a quiet square where Researchers-United had permanent accommodation reserved for trainees whose homes were out of London, and for visitors from abroad. The clock showed sixteen and ninepence. Suns got out and produced a pound note. Once again the driver spat.

'Just what is the matter?' Suns inquired.

'You bloody well know what's the matter.'

'I don't. I'd like to know.'

'You and your lot—that's what's the matter. Messing about with our girls. Keep Britain white—that's what I say.'

'But what have you got against us? We're British, like you.'

'You bloody well ain't like us, see? Why can't you stay where you belong instead of shoving in here? You're not wanted; you're not welcome; why don't you go back where you came from?'

A street lamp showed the driver's face clearly with its small hard eyes, pointed nose, and thin-lipped slit of a mouth. A rodent face, with a rodent's weak chin.

'But just a minute,' Suns protested; 'what harm do we do? Tell me that.'

'Harm? I'll tell you what harm you do. Me own daughter, takes up with a bleeding nigger, see? Now she's on the street, see? Keeping *him*, the bleeding black ponce. And aren't you doing the same?'

'No, I'm not.' How could he argue with a man so badly wounded? He added: 'I'm sorry. I'd like you to believe that we aren't all like that.'

The driver took the pound note he proffered, tucked it away, didn't even go through the motions of finding change, and seemed aggrieved when Suns said, 'Is that enough?' He drove off without another word.

Suns hadn't run head-on into hate before. All his time in London had been spent among white people who had been kind to him. (Mr Neston had been if anything rather too kind—embarrassingly so.) Had he lived and worked in a district where West Indians and Africans had moved in, he would have met hostility from the neighbouring whites; but he never saw his own countrymen, made no effort to seek them out or discover the whereabouts of their clubs and favourite coffee bars and pubs. He was going to keep well clear of them till he'd finished his training, and then he'd be properly equipped to do the pioneer job Mr Borrowdell had described. Meanwhile he was learning about white people; and Jack and Andy, Jenny and several other girls, young Turnbull, his mentor, Archi Neston

and many people at Researchers-United might have felt a little uneasy at the quality and variety of his knowledge, and how he was systematically using it to get what he wanted. He had no worries, except Mr Neston, and he had that situation under control. He'd play along innocently with Mr Neston until he could ask him to devote one of those Sunday car excursions to visiting Lady Corbel in her Warwickshire home. He knew they could drive there and back in one day, as she lived just over twelve miles from Stratford, and Stratford had seemed no distance in Mr Neston's Mercedes. He had written to her during his first week in London to say that he would like to thank her in person for the start she had given him in his new life. She had replied that she would be very pleased to see him any time. (Janet meant this: she still had a feeling of vague responsibility for Suns.)

Nothing but kindness—so far.

He was learning about white women; in his own way. He preferred to arrange his own lessons, and was glad he had avoided seeing Mrs Borrowdell again. Laura seldom came to Jack's office, and on the two occasions when he'd been invited to the flat, she wasn't there. He was far from forgetting Julie, but he couldn't help comparing her with Jenny; not just body for body, but in what those two vastly different girls expected from him, apart from love-making. Jenny was far less demanding than Julie, who was tyrannically possessive.

They didn't know much, these white girls; but he liked them, and soon discovered what a potent attraction he exerted for those in the office—even the married ones who were getting on in years. (And Andy, with all the innocence of the trained psychologist, thought they were making a pet of him.) 'Keep Britain white,' the taxi-driver had said. Well, from what little he'd seen so far they wouldn't be able to—not for long. And then there *would* be hate, fed by sexual jealousy, and by the sort of thing that had happened to the taxi-driver's daughter.

That incident didn't trouble his sleep.

On Saturday morning he woke later than usual, put out an arm, switched on the transistor by his bed, and caught the finale to an interview with a welfare worker.

'And those that don't make the grade?' asked the interviewer. (Oxford-and-Cambridge mixture, slightly falsetto.) A tiny pause; then a flat, expressionless reply:

'Some of them take to prostitution, especially those with personality problems.'

A bright, girlish voice snapped out a curtain line: 'The time is now half past eight.'

Maybe the taxi-man's daughter had a personality problem. Why should *he* care? Suns switched off, swung himself out of bed, turned on a bath and plugged in his razor. He was in the bath when the telephone rang. Wrapped in a towel he answered it and heard Archi Neston's proposal about lunch at Hampton Court.

'But I have to be at the Savoy, Mr Neston. Mr Borrowdell rang to tell me to be there.'

'It's been cancelled.' But as he said that, Archi Neston recalled that Mulgrove had merely told him he needn't bother to turn up. He had assumed that the whole thing had been cancelled following one of those quick changes of mind that made Americans so wretchedly unreliable. He added: 'What exactly did Mr Borrowdell tell you?'

'Said that he wanted me to meet the chief, and that I was to be at Mr Golantly's suite at twelve-thirty.'

'I see.' There was a balls-up somewhere. He'd better ring Andy. 'All right, Suns, we'll leave it.'

He called Andy's house at Richmond, spoke to Letty his wife, who said that Andy had left at crack of farting dawn. (Letty's language was as free as her manners: delivered in her small, rather plaintive voice foul words sounded childishly innocent.) 'Why do these bloody Yanks always wreck the week-end?' she

asked. 'Jack and Andy are having breakfast with the old sod. Breakfast indeed! If it's important, you'd better ring the Savoy.'

Archi Neston was puzzled. For some reason or other Jack wanted to exhibit his Negro trainee to T.G. But why exclude senior executives at the last moment, especially after getting them all lined up for the show? His first thought that some mistake had occurred didn't make sense either. Neither Jack nor Andy made those sort of mistakes, and he was sure that Suns had the message right.

He shrugged it off, thankful to escape the synthetic enthusiasms of a marketing evangelist.

Maurice was still petulant, and to punish him Archi rang up Suns again after breakfast. There was no reply. Suns had boarded a No. 19 bus in the Kings Road, and was on his way to Clapham Junction. He got off at the Falcon, walked slowly up St John's Hill, and arrived at Jenny's flat ten minutes after Sheila left.

Jenny opened the door. She wore a white house-coat, scrawled over with arabesques in silver thread. Her green eyes were wide and amorous.

'I was just thinking of tidying up,' she said demurely.

FOUR

'Today we are all talking and thinking of exploring new worlds—worlds in outer space; but although we live in the space age and the nuclear age, let us not forget that we are still living in the industrial age.' T.G. paused and surveyed his audience. The big sitting-room of his suite faced the Thames, and beyond the Embankment with its hurrying traffic, the river looked muddy and colourless under a grey sky. Muddy and colourless; flowing on relentlessly; like T.G.'s exhortation.

He was heard with polite attention; but he knew the temperature of that attention was dropping. He was losing touch with that unresponsive audience; maybe he hadn't been in touch with them at all. Difficult to get through to the British. They gave you a hearing, but nothing more; they never gave *themselves*. But there was nothing wrong with the set-up here, for Jack Borrowdell was coining money, expanding fast, and making a big dent in the thinking of several British industries. Yes, though he hated admitting it, right now London was doing better than New York or Chicago, where they'd run into big trouble over the research findings for the Kranson Corporation. R-U had sold the Corporation on a large-scale motivation research, which had been planned and carried out at a cost of two and a half million dollars. One of the biggest assignments they'd ever had. R-U's interpretation of that research had led to the production of the Kranson Assegai, the car that was going to sweep into the American market, as Hannibal and his army had once swept into Italy, and then on to world conquest. R-U had been given greater control than they'd ever had before, over design, marketing, and sales. The Corporation bowed down

and worshipped the plans that were scientifically impeccable, the plans that had taken the guesswork out of launching the new model—and incidentally had removed a few untidy old-fashioned obstacles, like imagination and common sense. The Corporation's team of industrial designers had been delivered bound to the task-masters of research; they had nothing to do but obey; and over half the team resigned. The rest did what they were told. Thirty-eight million dollars and two years were spent on tooling-up, and the result was a car that looked like an obscene fish.

Not even a nine-million-dollar advertising campaign, handled by C. S. & C., could smash the sales-resistance of the American public, who for once in a way refused to follow the easy road of docile acceptance. The Kranson Assegai was the flop of the century. All over the Union, research specialists and organizations felt the draught. That monumental failure shook the faith of industrialists in the incantations of the new medicine-men who had risen to power in the decade after the war, who were so often right, and so expert at passing the buck when they weren't. Researchers-United lost three of their biggest clients within as many weeks, and were still licking their wounds.

They were saved by American resilience. They still believed in the validity of their research techniques. They held innumerable internal conferences, which combined the functions of post-mortem, inquest, and court-martial. But the causes of failure eluded them. They discussed and analysed and dissected; then abruptly shut down on the whole profitless affair, after firing the executives who had prepared the brief for the designers. 'Write it off as experience,' T.G. had said. Forget it! Go all out to beat up new business.

That was the spirit that Jack Borrowdell admired without any reservations. T.G. had described the Kranson disaster and the plans for recovery that morning, and his account had hardened Jack's resolve to avoid risks likely to lose clients or damage the

reputation of the English branch. That branch, under his direction, might ultimately run the complete international set-up of R-U. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with his chance of bringing that off and stepping into T.G.'s shoes himself; certainly not Archi the homo. T.G. would be retiring in the not-far-distant future, unless he was going to turn into one of those oppressive ghosts who haunted a business, playing the elder statesman and boring the pants off everybody with recollections of the brave days of old. In ten years he would be the leading bore of the Free World: he was almost there now. But—he had guts and could inspire enterprise. And how astonishing it was that a man so rich in the stuff of leadership could ladle out such insipid hogwash.

Jack glanced at his colleagues. They were certainly putting up a good show. Not a sign of restiveness. No throat had been cleared. Coughs were strangled at birth.

'New thinking is needed for industry, here and now,' T.G. continued. 'We are geared as an organization to do that thinking. Our task is to find fresh markets for industry to satisfy, to create new needs for the advancement of civilized standards—everywhere. This is a great mission, dedicated to the betterment and increased happiness of our fellowmen. We are not only missionaries, we are explorers and adventurers, too; seeking and settling new fields for enterprise. We are not like advertising men. They follow us. We plough, they sow, and then a fresh crop of sales is reaped, industry is nourished, and production and prosperity increase. Everybody prospers. The bigger the sales, the greater the prosperity; but *we* are the pioneers who make both possible.'

Those who had heard it all before were patient; those who hadn't marvelled at the torrent of sententious puerility; and the only exception to the collective indifference was Suns. T.G.'s words brought him a new revelation.

T.G. had accepted Suns. He kept racial prejudices, like

religious beliefs, well insulated from his business life. Jack's idea of taking this long cool look at a future market was good. Hundred per cent good.

'You may be way ahead of your time, Jack,' he'd said approvingly; 'but you're right. The market will be there.'

'Not such a long way ahead,' Jack suggested. 'Things move fast, today. These people from the West Indies and Africa are settling here, marrying English girls, and in three generations they'll be absorbed completely. Meanwhile, they have jobs, they have money—not much—but the market potential they represent hasn't been thought about seriously—not thought about at all, I may say, outside R-U.'

'You just accept miscegenation?'

'It's inevitable.'

'It doesn't bother you?'

'Why should it? The English are a mongrel lot anyway. That's been our strength in the past. Maybe this is just the shot in the arm we want after wearing ourselves out in two big wars.'

'But miscegenation, Jack. That's different.'

'I don't see why. We'll face up to it all right; not pretend that it isn't there, like you do.'

'We won't have it,' T.G. asserted.

Andy said: 'You won't be able to help yourselves. Did you read an article that predicted a French-speaking mulatto population for the whole of North America from Hudson Bay to the Rio Grande? I had a clipping of it from the New York office. There was a hell of a row about it, but it was sound economics and anthropology, based on the rate of increase among Negroes and French Canadians. The former are reckless, the latter Roman Catholics. Between them they'll swamp you in about a hundred and fifty years. That was the thesis—it could come true.'

T.G. was not amused. He looked coldly at the portly, carelessly dressed Englishman who had reminded him, in such an

apparently innocent way, of a prophecy that he found both insulting and infuriating, all the more so because it was in line with some awkward facts. He knew Quebec as well as he knew the deep south. All this racial degradation might lie in the future, but the rot had started already. There were those bastards from Puerto Rico, too; the biggest headache New York City ever had, and they were a long, long way from being good consumers, keeping as they did their own language and their own sub-standards of life. Still, those were *his* country's problems. The British had plenty, too, but they weren't worrying themselves about the coloured people who were arriving week by week, though that must be building up to a very, very big problem. But to Jack and Andy, here on the spot, it was building up to a big market: they ignored the social problem. Or maybe they were just letting on that they ignored it.

They had talked the whole morning, and at cocktails before lunch Suns was presented to T.G. Jack had introduced him as 'Mr Alphon'. T.G. could find no fault with his manners or appearance. Nothing flashy about his clothes: no bright colours, everything subdued according to the British executive model. Later, T.G. noticed that he used soft drinks only, that he smoked two cigarettes, no more, and refused a cigar after lunch. Always observant, he saw that Suns was magnetized by his words, and towards the end of his speech he found himself addressing this youngster, ignoring the frigidity of the others, speaking to one man only, and almost forgetting that he was coloured.

Questions followed, and some rags and tatters of discussion, which gave T.G. a chance to make a few more pronouncements.

'Most of that was pretty good old hat,' said Andy, yawning, when it was all over, and he was back in Jack's flat. 'Suns fell for it all right: I'm disappointed in such innocence.'

'I put it down partly to his respect for power and money,' said Jack, yawning too. 'Damn you, Andy—you've started me

off. I shall yawn my head off. Well, thank the lord T.G.'s on his way to Milan. If he hadn't had that plane to catch, we'd be there still.'

'They've taken a fearful toss over the Kranson Assegai.'

'C. S. & C. have lost their name pretty heavily, too. The first campaign they dreamed up had the slogan, "Out, out, out in your Assegai!" Pictures of lovelies and crew-cut toughies singing it. It was just asking to be changed to "Out, out, out on your ass!" They had to can that campaign, and start again. By that time the car was out on its ass too, good and proper.' Jack laughed. 'By the way, you'll be able to fit this young Semple character in for six months for a look-see without any trouble, won't you?'

'Easily. We'll put him in with the trainees.'

'He's Marshall Kane Semple Junior, though now I suppose he'll call himself Marshall Kane Semple II. I never knew the old man, but he was a friend of T.G.'s. Young Semple's going into C. S. & C., and he's been on the road in the Middle West, selling detergents. You weren't there when T.G. told me all this. Old man Semple died a few weeks ago, practically in the arms of Laura's aunt; on the same ship where Suns was a stowaway.'

'What's Marshall Kane Semple II like? Any idea?'

Jack shook his head. 'Apart from the fact that he's the eldest of the four Semple boys, I know nothing about him. He's due to show up here at the end of the month.'

FIVE

When Jack Borrowdell had told those catechizing American wives that Lady Letitia Mulgrove was rather like Laura, he was thinking of her almost arrogant independence of mind, her unpredictable ideas, and her armour-plated indifference to what people thought about her; but there all resemblance ended. Letty had Victorian ideas of the sanctity of marriage and the duties of a wife and mother. Her frank manners and even franker speech were misleading; behind that unconventional façade she lived a prim and tidy life, which Andy shared to his great contentment. She was a blonde with honey-coloured skin, large blue eyes under heavy dark eyebrows—Stuart eyebrows, as Andy always told her: all the Bebbington women had them, and Letty left hers unplucked—and a large, full-lipped mouth. She was tall, just over five foot nine, physically tough, and good at games without being fanatical about them. She had five children: three boys and twin girls: the eldest boy was nine, the twins seven, and the younger boys five and three. She believed in a well-spaced family, and proposed to extend it to seven. When Andy had become prosperous, as he did shortly after Jack took him on, he bought a large house off the Queen's Road in Richmond, within five minutes' walk of the Park; before that they had lived in Sussex, in primitive conditions, on one of the almost derelict Bebbington farms, and Andy had commuted.

Letty ran their house, as she ran everything, with unfussing competence, and gave her children the secure happiness of a well-disciplined upbringing. As Suns would have said, SHE WAS THE ONE WHO. Andy's psychological know-how was never

permitted to enter the home; he respected and deferred to Letty's judgment, and had no business secrets from her.

'Was it all very bloody, my sweet?' she asked, when Andy woke late on Sunday morning after a restless night. She kissed him, then poured out his early morning cup of tea.

'T.G. wasn't too awful. I think he's ageing. He'd allowed the hot air he was full of to get a bit tepid. I tried to stir him up by having a dig at his attitude to Negroes; but he didn't go beyond giving me a cold, fishy look.'

'What's troubling you, then? You were muttering in your sleep. That's always a sign of trouble.'

'Only Jack's damned pig-headedness over Archi.'

'Oh, that—it's going to put you in a spot, isn't it?'

'I tried to make him see reason again last night: he's hopeless. I've offered to have a private talk with Archi——'

'Oh, that's no good, darling. You might as well ask Laura to give up men.'

'How you two girls love one another.'

'Believe it or not, I quite like Laura—particularly when she isn't there. But about Archi: I can't understand why Jack can't be a bit patient. Archi's crush on that darkie is bound to pass off.'

'He's panicking. All the more so since T.G. gave us the dope about the Kranson mess.'

'Tell me.'

He told her, and she laughed. Then she became silent and serious. Andy glanced at her. Those tiny lines between her emphatic eyebrows came when she was thinking hard. Her thinking was usually productive, in a startling, roundabout way. Presently she said: 'T.G.'s in Milan.'

'Yes.'

'How long is he going to stay there?'

'Three days. Then he flies direct to Chicago to stir things up there. Why? What's in your mind?'

'Yanks are always impressed if anybody hops on a plane and puts an idea to them, face to face. You or Jack could fly to Milan tonight or tomorrow.'

'Yes—of course we could, but why?'

'Jack wants to get Archi out of the firm, doesn't he? Well, he could, without sacking him. At least for a time. Can't you cook up a story that you'd like to send one of your top people over to examine the whole Kranson affair on the spot?'

'They've closed the file, as they say in the Civil Service. I don't think T.G. would wear that.'

'Jack could make him wear anything.'

'I doubt whether Jack would wear it either.'

'Look, idiot, don't you want help? Don't you want to keep Archi in the business?'

'Of course I do: don't ask rhetorical questions.'

'Well, then. Appeal to Jack's lowest instincts, which are all bound up with the farting business. Archi could get taken on somewhere else tomorrow, couldn't he?'

'The Effernay outfit would pay a lot for him—probably more than we do.'

'And they're competitors, aren't they?'

'Nearly our size and weight. Archi would be a godsend to them.'

'Yes, that's why I've been asking rhetorical questions, sweet idiot of mine. I like Archi: homos are twice as amusing as good plain fornicators and I shall tell him to go and see Kate at Efferneys. She's a lizzy, and she's had a sort of frustrated lech on me ever since we were Wrens together. It'll give her a great lift with the high-ups in Efferneys if she winkled Archi out of R-U.'

'You can't do that, Letty.'

'Can't I? Shall do—unless.'

'Kate's a bloody woman—I can't see Archi teaming up with her, or anybody else in that outfit.'

'You're trying to put me off, and you said just now that he'd be a godsend to them. As for teaming up with Kate—that would work all right. They're not in competition for fun and games: he stays with his sex, she with hers. Perfect. I shall ring Jack up at once and ask him how soon I can tell Kate to get after Archi.'

'Wait a minute.' Andy got out of bed. 'I'll call Jack up. You've given me an idea.'

'Two, sweet. You've only just grasped the second one.'

Jack had driven down to Doveridge after Andy had gone home, starting at midnight and making good time. Just over two hours later he passed the grey, silent houses of Chipping Campden, and climbed the hill to his house. Laura was asleep, and didn't stir when he slipped into bed beside her.

The telephone woke them both, for Dis and Dat never disturbed them on a Sunday morning, unless there were guests. About one week-end in five they reserved for themselves; and T.G. had wrecked this one. Jack yawned, stretched, and said, 'What son-of-a-bitch is ringing at this ungodly hour?'

The telephone was on Laura's side of the big double bed, and she answered it. 'Andy—what do you want? We're still asleep.'

'As long as I've only disturbed your sleep and nothing else, I don't mind,' said Andy; 'but I want to argue with Jack.'

'Why don't you drive down for lunch and argue with him here?'

'I might if I had a helicopter, as I've only a car——'

'What a gorgeous idea, Andy.' Within a couple of minutes of opening her eyes, Laura was always in top gear. 'Jack, darling, Andy wants to argue with you and says he could be here for lunch if he had a helicopter—why don't you get a helicopter? Think of the time you'd save when you have to go to Leeds and Manchester.'

He leant over and took the telephone from her. 'What d'you want to argue about, Andy?' he asked.

'Archi.'

'I'm not arguing.'

'But I am. I want you to have second and even third thoughts about Archi, and I'll tell you why.'

Jack listened. He had never known Andy to be so persistent, and soon realized that there was more in this fresh suggestion than anxiety to avoid the temporary burden of work that Andy would carry if Archi went. Also the idea fitted in with his own long-distance plans. This might be the golden moment of opportunity, when he could become in T.G.'s eyes a potential second-in-command of Researchers-United Inc—even the president-elect.

He wasted no time. 'All right, Andy, you win,' he said. 'I'll call up T.G., and be on my way to Milan tonight.'

The best his hard-worked secretary could do on her ruined Sunday was to get him on an early morning flight, and before eleven-thirty that first Monday in May he was drinking a cocktail with T.G., sitting in Italian sunlight on the balcony of his hotel suite.

No, you never could tell with the British, T.G. reflected, as he listened to Jack's proposals. They were cold—just ice all the way through, you might think; then suddenly they came alive. He had been depressed by Saturday's conference. Apart from that nigger, nobody seemed to care. They were way, way off. And now, they were close. This was the pay-off. Yes, sir! They'd spent that sacred British week-end of theirs getting down to overall R-U problems.

When he said 'cut' he meant 'cut', but he'd go back on that: he'd reopen the Kranson inquiry. He'd disliked abandoning it; but knew what it might do to morale if it went on too long without getting any place. But this was a new angle. And the costs were going to be carried by London.

'Why wasn't Neston there on Saturday?' he asked.

'Don't get me wrong about this,' said Jack; 'but he's very

much a solus worker, and unless he's organized it or is addressing it himself, he detests a conference. Again, I say: don't get me wrong. *I* took the decision, and don't think he isn't a good mixer: he is, but like so many specialists in his line, he's a queer devil. He'd be snapped up tomorrow if he wasn't happy with us.'

T.G. smiled. 'Suppose *we* want him to stay with us in New York?'

'I should mind like hell—but if you did grab him off us, and he wanted to stay—well, T.G., it's all in the family.'

T.G. sighed. 'Jack—that's something I'm real glad to hear from you. I sometimes feel you boys over here don't feel you're in the family like the rest of us. I know now that you're thinking with us and for us as a great international body.'

And that was precisely what Jack wanted him to believe. This wasn't the first time that Andy had come up with something good. (When Letty heard about it a little later, she claimed no credit. She let Andy think he was the sole author of the idea, and by then he believed he was.)

'But I still don't know why you pointedly excluded me from the conference on Saturday,' said Archi Neston, when Jack told him why he was being seconded to the New York office.

'I'll be honest with you,' Jack told him. 'You've never met T.G., and I didn't want your first meeting to put you right off. You're a touchy character, Archi, and you know it, and to expose you to one of T.G.'s dissertations about bugger-all, would have put you dead against the idea. You may not believe it, but I do consider other people's feelings sometimes.'

When Jack concentrated on a sales story, he was difficult to resist. You felt that he had lavished time and thought on your interests. Nobody is quite so easy to sell things to as a psychologist, and this was a flattering idea. Archi bought it. The prospect of a couple of months in New York was attractive—

especially in the spring. He hadn't been there for nearly four years.

'You should be able to find out what went wrong in two months,' Jack said. 'Maybe you'll clear it up sooner; but anyway, stay out the full eight weeks and grab all the ideas you can.'

In another six weeks, Suns would have completed the first part of his internal training, and would start field work, out of the office.

'Poor Maurice,' thought Archi. He wasn't looking forward to breaking it to Maurice, but he had to do it at once, as he was leaving on Friday.

Maurice cried all night. Suns' visit to Janet receded.

SIX

When Janet met Suns again, her first thought was, 'What on earth have they done to him?' Something, some experience, had subdued the bubbling eagerness and exaggerated the earnestness; the gaiety had gone; he had become warily attentive. He rather overdid the part of receptive listener; nobody, no normal person, expected their words to be received with such reverence. Then she recognized the model. He was imitating Jack, and the imitation rose no higher than parody. He had Jack's trick of inclining his head to one side, of half-closing his eyes as though inwardly considering the significance of what had been said, of reopening them suddenly, wide and bright with fresh understanding. She smiled. The symptoms of hero-worship might seem silly, but were far from contemptible. But she regretted the transformation of the care-free, happy youngster in the pale grey clothes and scarlet tie, laughing with his girl on the wharf at San Jago. He was now the business executive: authentic pattern: dark flannel suit, white shirt, dark blue tie, chestnut-coloured shoes: the right clothes for a cocktail party in the garden of a country house. (Suns had been doubtful about brown shoes, but Tim Turnbull had reassured him when they were packing at Mother Hurst's. Tim, resplendent in a dark-blue blazer with flat gilt buttons and the arms of his college embroidered on the breast pocket, wore brown suede shoes and dark-grey slacks.)

The occasion was the first week-end in June, invariably earmarked by Jack and Laura for entertaining R-U trainees at Doveridge. Janet was always invited too. Laura knew how much she enjoyed the company of young people, and Jack, who

valued her views on them, was naïvely unaware that he was doing to his own promising young men and women exactly what T.G. and his wife tried to do at their probe parties for new executives. He was checking up on their reactions, observing how they went down with a few other selected guests who, like Janet, had nothing to do with the business, noting also how well or badly they got on with each other outside the office. Laura and Jack were artists in hospitality. They never attempted to organize the time or thwart the inclinations of their guests, who were expected to be punctual for meals, but were otherwise left to their own devices. Everybody felt at home within minutes of Laura's usual welcome. 'Do just what you like; you won't tread on anybody's toes whatever you do.' After they'd taken possession of Doveridge, Jack had said, 'By the time we've finished, this'll be a stately home without the stuffiness. People can enjoy themselves here without getting in each other's way or under our feet. I've always wanted plenty of space.'

The thirty acres surrounding Doveridge Manor included a mixed plantation that acted as a wind-break on the south-west of the estate; two orchards; a vast, productive vegetable garden; and various small, secluded, almost secret gardens, badly neglected, for during the last twelve years of his life Sir Temple Sheenley had lived indoors, and kept only one aged gardener to look after the vegetables and orchards. Jack employed an outside staff of four. He had made two hard tennis courts and built a spacious swimming pool, filled from a spring that supplied in never-failing abundance all the water needed in the house. (He could offer his guests the rare luxury of unchlorinated water to drink.) There was a large maze, one of the few remaining in England, laid out in the mid-eighteenth century, when its walls of yew were planted. Those close-growing hedges, now seven feet high, shadowed the narrow mossy paths that curled and zig-zagged around an oblong central space. The

maze had been made for Sir Horace Sheenley, the second baronet, a scholarly rake, author of a masterly treatise on the antique refinements of sexual intercourse, who had acquired, during extensive travels in Italy, Greece, and Syria, some unusual souvenirs. One of these stood in the centre of the maze, where on a marble pedestal of classic design a bronze satyr and a compliant nymph were lasciviously employed. The figures had been boxed in with stout oak planking (shortly after the marriage of Queen Victoria) by Sir Wishart Sheenley, the fourth baronet and father of Sir Temple, who was contemplating marriage himself, with the excessively pious daughter of a neighbour. For well over a hundred years the casing remained, weathering to a silvery grey, while the jocund pagan creatures inside waited in darkness for the sunlight of another shock-proof age. Nobody living knew what the casing concealed, till after Jack acquired the property. He opened up the neglected maze, had the overgrown bushy hedges trimmed, the paths weeded, and the figures exposed.

Laura had wanted to move them into the house, but Jack refused. 'Be sensible, babe,' he protested. 'I don't want my valued clients to think they've come to a knocking-shop when I give 'em a week-end here. They'll stay where they are; and I'll give tired business men a bit of a lift by giving them a private view of the maze; but only after I've taken their moral temperature. Some of those hard-headed types from up North are easily jolted, and many of them are quite religious on Sunday when they're at home.'

The tall iron gate to the maze was always kept locked.

June had opened with brilliant sunshine, and the seven trainees had arrived by road on Saturday morning, five men and two girls distributed in three cars. Janet drove over before lunch, and was introduced to them all as cocktails were being served on the lawn below the terrace.

'Suns you already know,' said Laura, 'and you can have him

to yourself to talk to afterwards. Now, this is Violet Olafa.' She linked arms with a tall, smiling Negress, sheathed in electric blue. 'Violet's from Ghana; she's been here four years, got her degree at the London School of Economics, and Jack snapped her up. I think Jack's lucky. Violet, this is my aunt, Lady Corbel. I'm going on with the potted biographies, Aunt Janet—it's simpler. Here's the other girl of the party, Jenny Lamprey. She's been with Jack a long time, but she's been promoted and now she's training to be an executive—that's right, isn't it, Jenny?'

Jenny nodded her red curls. 'Career girl, that's me,' she said, her impudent green eyes sparkling. (But you're not quite hard enough for that to be true, thought Janet; you're wild now, but you'll be somebody's competent wife some day.)

Another Negro: a colossal bronze: the tallest man there, six foot five. Older than Suns, Janet guessed. Stately, slow-moving, dignified. She felt he should be wearing robes—or nothing: a lounge suit was as silly on such physical splendour as it would be on the Hermes of Praxiteles.

'Also from Ghana,' said Laura. 'Mr Uza M'Kambu. The Law.'

'But no longer a lawyer,' explained the giant, with a twisted smile. 'I was foolish enough to defend a member of the opposition; and after that there was nothing left for me at home. My client is incommunicado, pending sentence. I am still free—but only because I am here. Mr Borrowdell has given me a new life.'

His voice, rising from the depths of that huge body, was richer than Suns' and had none of the slightly American tone of the West Indian. The sadness of his eyes cancelled out the gaiety of his smile.

Tim Turnbull, for all his six feet, looked small by comparison. A cheerful public school product. Oxford. A rowing blue with a brain and sharp grey eyes that didn't miss anything. Standard good manners. Charm, plus. Ultimate objective in R-U: top-

level social contact man and business-getter. Then Dr Angus Grieg, whom everybody called Sandy, a short, muscular man with hair as uncompromisingly red as Jenny's, and a freckled face. Every line on that face proclaimed seriousness of purpose (and complete lack of any softening humour), and every word he spoke flaunted the superior advantage of Scottish birth and upbringing. Aberdeen. Scholarships, Honours, a Ph.D. at twenty-eight.

Finally, Marshall Kane Semple II, and Janet found the dark-blue eyes of Mavis looking at her intently.

Marshall was tall and thick rather than broad; promising to be as large and lumbering as his father when overtaken by middle age. Meanwhile, youth gave him the grace of a great cat; but the elephant would eventually struggle through, and the smooth, standardized healthy young American male face of the kind that exudes joy of living in ads for after-shave lotions and electric razors, would be folded away behind a wrinkled, bloated mask. In twenty years: perhaps less. 'I'm growing morbid,' Janet told herself. Even before he spoke, she knew he was going to turn on the warm tap of synthetic charm. He did, monopolizing her for the space of three drinks, slowly and deliberately imbibed. When he'd said all the correct and obvious things about her kindness to his mother, and told her how glad he was she'd met his father, he got on to his favourite subject—himself. 'He's exactly like Mavis,' Janet thought, resuming her accustomed part of quiescent listener.

She was rescued at last by Jenny Lamprey, who took the empty glass Marshall was holding, gave him another dry martini, and said: 'Shut him up, Lady Corbel, when you've had enough. He just goes on and on; but he's a good boy. He knows it's time to stop when he's told, and he never minds. I'll say that for him. He was born without a temper.'

Marshall grinned. 'Now just why are you giving me this build-up?' he inquired.

'Just being friendly—everybody's friend. That's me.'

'I'll say you are.'

'Let's go and get lost in the maze—there's plenty of time before lunch, and Mrs Borrowdell's lent me the key, but she said I must go and have a look by myself.'

'There's no percentage in that.'

'Just what I thought.' Her arm slid through his, urging him away. She saw Suns hovering near, and five minutes ago he'd said: 'Honey, I'd be grateful if you'd get Marshall away from Lady Corbel. I want to talk to her.'

'And what do I get if I oblige?'

'What you usually want.'

(Women! They were all the same. White or black, they all had their tongues hanging out for it. He'd known ever since Jack had taken her on that he could have Violet Olafa. Oh, well; so long as it didn't waste too much time or hold him back.)

As Jenny led Marshall away, Suns addressed himself to Janet. He was grave, polite, and slightly pompous. She tried to break through that façade.

'Are you happy?' she asked.

'Never been so happy before, Lady Corbel.'

'Why?'

'I can see ahead—I know now where I'm going.'

She listened to a recital of his ambitions, which could be fulfilled—if not immediately, at least within measurable time. She remembered that the chief thing he'd wanted when he'd first talked to her at Vega was money. 'Big money,' he said then. Now he wanted power.

Jack and Laura had told her from time to time about his progress. Several of the women in R-U could have told her a lot more about him; but they kept their knowledge to themselves. The fact that Suns was a Negro was a guarantee of secrecy for any affair. Now that Archi Neston, with his hyper-sensitive

perceptions, was out of the office, the discreet, determined pursuit of Suns by five women apart from Jenny never became common knowledge. And Suns was safe: he was silent about his conquests—conquests? They were more like offerings of tribute with no suggestion of a battle to be fought and won.

Experience had strengthened his confidence. He had ceased to be nervous of Laura, though today was only the second time he'd met her.

Janet asked him why he wanted power.

'To do something for the black British,' he said. 'They want a leader: they don't know it, they don't know that they want anything, except just to live from day to day. They're too happy, doing just that.'

'Why disturb their happiness?'

'Oh, I shan't disturb that: I'll change the sort of happiness. That's Mr Borrowdell's idea,' he admitted; 'but they won't be the big, good consumers that will make them a worthwhile market till they learn to want more. I'm going to live up north, soon. I've spent a few days, here and there, in different parts of London, to see the sort of lives the folks from the islands and Africa are living. They don't like each other. The Africans look down on us—they're still close to their tribes. They've got tradition. They've never been slaves.'

'Neither have you.'

'No—but we're all descended from slaves.' He told her about his grandfather and Fergus Alphon. 'By the way, I'm calling myself Alphon now, not Alpy.'

'Why?'

'It was Mr Borrowdell's idea. He suggests that I change Suns to Sunley. So I'll be Sunley Alphon.'

'I see. Where are you going to in the north?'

'Merseyside. Liverpool and Birkenhead. I go there at the end of this month. I shall be there till October. Then I write a report. Mr Borrowdell has had some specimen reports from

me: I've done North Kensington, Brixton, and Battersea. Now he wants a big report, not just notes; but something big and'—Suns paused—'properly organized,' he concluded.

The sound of a gong throbbed and boomed from the house.

'That's lunch,' said Janet, and they walked in together.

Everybody assembled in the great hall, but Jenny and Marshall were missing.

'They must have heard it,' said Laura. 'But I'll get Dat to take it outside, so they'll hear it wherever they are.'

They heard it all right; but getting out of the maze was very different from getting into it. Also when they reached the centre, the example of the bronze was too compelling that first week-end in June. The green patina on the figures glowed in the sunlight. Springy turf encircled the pedestal. They were too preoccupied to bother about the distant gong the first time it sounded. When its summons, repeated insistently as it was carried round the house by Dat, could no longer be ignored, they tidied themselves up, and tried to get out.

They were still trying an hour later, until Laura remembered giving Jenny the key of the maze. Jack went to find them with the plan of the paths in his pocket. When discovered, the pair were hot and tired, and furious with each other. Although Marshall excelled in pursuit and persuasion, he was a fumbler, nervously uncertain of his potency. 'Clumsy, aren't you?' said Jenny. She had only just restrained herself from comparing his performance unfavourably with Suns', and channelled her disappointment into denunciations of his stupidity in not being able to find his way out. 'Any fool can find his way into a maze,' she said; 'and I know now that's about all you damn well can find your way into.'

SEVEN

A few minutes after two a.m. on Sunday morning, Jack was roused from a deep sleep by the telephone: he listened to the ringing, expecting Laura to answer, wondering why she didn't wake. He tried to prod her, but his hand discovered empty space. She wasn't there. Rolling over to her side of the bed, he picked up the instrument, and a voice asked him to stand by for a trans-Atlantic call. 'I bet it's T.G.,' he thought. It was. 'Yorktown Heights calling Campden, England. Go ahead, please.' So the old bastard was speaking from Katonah. T.G.'s voice came on: 'Hi, Jack: I had to call you—wouldn't be right if I didn't talk it out with you. We got a party here, and I ducked out for a piece.'

'We've had a party, too.'

'Not interrupting you?' (Shade of anxiety in the voice; special consideration stop pulled out: the old bastard wanted to sell him something.)

'Hardly. Everybody went to bed about midnight. We're holding a week-end conference here for our trainees.' (*Conference* added tone.)

'Jack, that's good to hear. You never let up on the job.'

'Only when I'm in bed, T.G., where I am now. You forget the difference in our time when you're out of your office. It's early on Sunday here, though you're still in Saturday. Nearly two fifteen a.m., just for the record. Not that I mind—you've always got something to say.' (I'll give him some of the best butter. Just a part of the build-up for the heir-presumptive to the R-U kingdom.)

'Jack, I'm real sorry. Guess I'm growing old.'

'You'll never grow old, T.G.' (More butter.)

'We all get that way, Jack. Now I feel badly about this. I bust into your bedroom, wake you up, to hand out some news you won't like.'

'I can take it—and I can guess what it is, too.'

He heard a dry, rasping rattle: the nearest T.G. ever came to a chuckle. Then: 'You tell *me*, Jack.'

'You want to hang on to Archi Neston. Check?'

'That's so, Jack. We *have* to have him.'

'Yes. That's what I was afraid of. There was a gleam in your eye when you mentioned the possibility in Milan. Remember?'

'I remember you said then that if we wanted him, and he wanted to stay, that it was all in the family.'

'And I still say so.'

'Fine, Jack, fine. He did a swell job on the Kranson problem. Yes, sir! And we don't ever prepare another design brief like we prepared that one: we get the interpretation done by the biggest design consultants we can buy from now on.' The dry rattle sounded again. 'He's like you, Jack.' (God forbid—still, T.G. doesn't know Archi like I do!)

'I don't get it.'

'Doesn't give what you'd like to hear, but comes out *spang* with what *he* thinks. He certainly thinks straight.' Archi, it appeared, had dug deep into the Kranson mess, surprised everybody by studying the dossiers of the two executives who'd drawn up the brief for the design team, then insisted on seeing them, although they'd been fired. He had to go to Los Angeles to find one: the other was still in New York. Both were more than willing to talk, and most unwilling to stop. Within minutes, Archi had uncovered the trouble, and was amazed at the massive innocence of R-U and Kransons which had caused it. He knew how specialization withers sensibility, but was not prepared for

eyeless monsters. The visual arts meant nothing to those two men, though, like many mathematicians, they were music lovers.

He hadn't argued with them. He listened attentively, then relayed his findings, unsweetened. The human element had not merely been discounted: it had never been thought of at all by anybody at R-U or the Kranson Corporation.

All this emerged as T.G. rambled on, while Jack interjected appreciative noises. The monologue ended at last. More butter. A valedictory dollop.

'Good-bye, T.G. Take care of yourself. We can get another Archi Neston, but we couldn't get another T.G.'

'Or another Jack!'

How Americans loved this sort of guff! He cradled the receiver, got out of bed, and put on a dressing gown.

The warm scents of the June night had invaded the room. He felt too wide awake to think of sleep, and dirty little speculations about the reason for Laura's absence nagged at him. She must be pottering about somewhere in pyjamas, for her primrose silk dressing gown was draped over the stool by the dressing table. What the devil was she up to?

Crossing to the long window, where the casements between the worn stone mullions were wide open, he looked over the moonlit gardens, stretching away to the dark mass of the big plantation. The solitary sycamore on the edge of the broad lawn cast a ragged oval shadow; beyond the lawn, its tall hedges rising like the abrupt forbidding walls of a miniature fortress, stood the maze.

An owl flopped out of the sycamore. He heard the faint *whoosh* of its passage, rising above the soft undercurrent of tiny sounds, the squeaking, creaking, and rustling, audible only on a still night. An odd, ungainly flight; more like falling than flying; clumsy but deadly. Something small and furry was doomed.

In the far distance a goods train was panting and clanking westwards.

Where the hell was Laura, and *what* was she doing?

The engine of the distant train whistled, reminding him of a wolf whistle—pregnant with invitation. Only elderly British railway engines and young American males could emit that precise note.

He thought of Marshall Kane Semple II, putative wolf, with his no-woman-is-safe-when-I'm-around manner. He hadn't much use for that particular American male, nor had Andy, who'd said: 'If he hadn't been born in the right bedroom, he'd be a bell-boy in a cheap hotel and end up as the janitor of a brothel. He'll talk big and act small, and I suspect that he falls down on "specific performance", as lawyers say in another context.' Andy was probably right: so many of those hot-pants athletes stopped short at necking: once past the bedroom door they were as scared as Victorian spinsters.

Something had certainly scared Marshall that afternoon: Jack had no doubt about that. Laura, divining the trouble, attempted to make amends by taking him on a personally conducted tour of the maze. He could hardly refuse an invitation from his hostess, though he'd had more than enough of the maze.

'I don't want to get lost again,' he'd said.

'You won't,' she promised. 'I'm an architect—I carry the plan in my head.'

She sensed his nervousness. The all-conquering he-man act was in abeyance. He was badly deflated, and terrified of Laura's resolute smile. Going into that maze with this dame was like entering a cage with a tiger.

'That boy needs help,' she told Jack after the party was over, and they were in bed.

'Why and how?' he asked.

'He's only a boy—pretending to be grown up. He's shy of women—too shy to be quite healthy.'

Then she'd started talking about Suns and Uza M'Kambu. 'They're far more interesting than Tim Turnbull and that grim little Scot,' she said; 'but I suppose they'll all end up much the same—your standard executive pattern. Of course Tim's a pre-fabricated executive: nearly all public school types are. They're so clean and tidy and anxious to do the right things.'

'I prefer 'em clean and tidy: not like the smelly monkey-house you bring down here, with the sweat and dust of the last Aldermaston march still on them. Don't those dreary beards and bitchès in your office ever wash?'

'At least my people believe in something, and put their convictions before their comfort. Now your lot don't believe in anything except bigger and better business. Suns is like that now, and Uza may be soon, though I doubt it. He'll be the exception. Suns has changed. You've been giving him a course of snobbery. Calling him Sunley Alpion—Jack, what bloody nonsense! He was sweet. Now, God help him, he's half-baked sophisticated, and——' She paused.

'And what?'

'Dangerous. Perhaps not actively yet—but one day he'll use everything he's picked up, and he'll use it for himself alone. He's going to be just like you. He's already got your superficial mannerisms—Aunt Janet spotted that after she'd talked to him. He'll be as ruthless as you or old T.G. I'm beginning to see the main difference between the West Indians and the Africans. Suns wants to do everything as well or a bit better than whites: white men are his model. His own people are nothing in his eyes. I've been listening to him tonight and that comes out the whole time, in nearly everything he says. Uza is totally different: he belongs to his own people—he's one of them, and sees them growing into something in their own right. He'll learn

from you, Jack—but he doesn't want to be *like* you or any white man. He's got pride; but Suns only has ambition.'

'Suns has more than that,' said Jack. 'He has ability, common sense, and the enormous asset of total recall. With his powers of concentration, and the opportunities we shall give him, he'll push on fast. He's prepared to sacrifice a lot of things that Negroes value: at first I didn't think he would. I was wrong. I'm still learning about Negroes.'

'I've learnt a lot tonight myself,' said Laura. 'Believe it or not, Uza admires Dr Nkrumah. He thinks democracy for Africans has to come through dictatorship, and that he made a big mistake in defending a member of the opposition. You won't keep him—he'll go back to Ghana when he thinks it's safe.'

'What did you think of the two girls?'

'Not very interesting—but then I've not talked to them much.'

She wouldn't waste time talking to women if men were around, as Jack knew very well.

He remembered that conversation as he leant out of the window, surveying the quiet garden, and wondering where she was. Better, perhaps, if he didn't know. He feared the irrevocable decision that one day might follow some shattering discovery; a decision made in anger that he'd regret all his life. The amplitude of Laura's generosity; her rabid compassion for people who'd been knocked about by life; her reckless indiscretion; and—something always to be faced—her appetite, were built-in characteristics. Consistent toleration was the price exacted for the excitement and delight of her love and companionship. On the whole, he paid up willingly. Without her life would have an acrid taste, so far as it had any flavour at all. 'Why doesn't she come back?' he murmured to himself; and wryly recalled the tribulations of his first love—always waiting for a girl who was always late. He was surprised by the sharp pain of the memory. 'I'm getting sentimental,' he told himself.

Then he saw Laura crossing the lawn from the direction of the maze. She was wearing what looked like one of his flannel jackets over her emerald pyjamas. Her feet were bare.

He held his breath, and waited.

She walked very slowly.

She was alone.

Presently she came softly into the bedroom, saw him by the window, and said: 'So you can't sleep, either.'

'T.G. rang me from Katonah. What the hell have you been doing?'

'I've been in the maze. I've never seen the group in moonlight before. It's marvellous walking in the dew.'

He put his hands on her shoulders. 'Been doing anything silly?' he asked, trying to make the question sound light.

'Haven't been allowed to.'

He slid his hands down from her shoulders. She was surprised by the violence of his caresses. 'Dear Jack,' she said.

Then, later: 'Darling—that was practically rape.'

She lay back, relaxed and happy, while Jack dozed off. She was glad she hadn't been allowed to do anything silly, she'd overheard that sprightly red-head giving Suns some explicit directions. They were probably together now in her bedroom. That absolved her from any sense of obligation; his confidence needed no buttressing by favours from her; but she was still troubled by her repulsion. 'It's not *me*,' she thought.

'Only another month, Suns,' Jenny was whispering. 'Look—Sheila's on holiday during your last week. Why not move in with me?'

'Got too much to do, honey.'

'Come off it—you've been given a week's holiday before you go to Birkenhead. You might give a girl a break.'

'Won't promise, honey. One night, perhaps.'

'You're a mean basket.'

'Got too much to do,' he repeated. He had. Jenny had been second in the queue that night. He'd come to her from Violet Olafa's bedroom. Just as well to get properly acquainted, as he'd have to team up with Violet in the Birkenhead assignment.

This was the beginning of his success story.

Julie and the island were far away.

SUCCESS STORY

ONE

Two years passed, then Suns launched an idea on the world. It was not an original idea; the prototype had been in circulation in America for some years; but it was startlingly new in Britain and made an immediate impact on business executives, industrial tycoons, advertising agents, specialists in public relations, and nearly everybody who had something to sell, like non-conformist ministers, politicians of all parties, and intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, who were peddling uplift, lies, or social theories. But the biggest impact of all was on Negroes, for it gave them status both as a community and a consumer market; and, far more important, it gave them entertainment. Nobody could say that it 'filled a long-felt want', because no Negro was aware that he wanted it till he got it.

'Why hasn't it been thought of before?' asked Andy, when he'd finished reading the terse, compact memorandum of plan which Suns had sent to Jack.

'Every great idea seems simple and obvious, when somebody else has thought it up,' Jack answered. 'But this is a big thing, and will land Suns in the big time.'

'This youngster startles me, I don't mind admitting,' said Andy thoughtfully; 'he turns one's ideas upside down.'

'That's because there's too much *Sanders of the River* in your background thinking. This was bound to happen directly an educated Negro with guts and ability went into business instead of politics. All we have to do is to get the backing.'

'Somebody'll drop a packet.'

'Hell, man, you talk as if it was foredoomed to be a flop: it'll

cost millions, of course, but there are millions knocking about, waiting to be invested. We'll get the backing. I'll see to that. And we'll be in it, and so will Suns, cheering on the ground floor.'

Suns had already injected some paying ideas into the blood stream of R-U Ltd, but this was a revolutionary proposition. The commercial reward would eventually be enormous, if somebody with money and faith could be found; and Jack was confident that he could find somebody. For himself, he saw greater independence and power, more desirable in his view than money, and a drastically changed relationship with the R-U Corporation which would improve his chances of inheriting the presidency, when T.G. retired. Six months ago T.G. had had his first coronary, and, acting on the advice of his doctors to go slow, made Jack a vice-president of the American corporation, consulting him on every major problem, and agreed, often without discussion, to almost anything he cared to propose. Jack's visits to New York were stepped up to at least three a month, and sometimes he made weekly trips, Thursday to Saturday. He seemed to spend his time hopping on and off planes. He knew he was tough and could take that sort of life, but at times he felt empty and exhausted, unable to sleep at night.

Laura was troubled about him.

'Don't go and buy yourself a lot of ulcers, darling,' she warned. 'I shouldn't be much use to an invalid. I never know what to say to people in bed—when they're ill, I mean.'

'I ought to live in New York,' he said; 'at least part of the time.'

'Well, as long as you don't expect me to.'

'I must be on the spot if I'm going to run that show when T.G. packs it in.'

'Like waiting for a rich uncle to die, isn't it?'

'I'd better get myself an apartment off Madison—as close to

the office as I can. I'm sick of hotels, and I loathe staying with T.G. and that blonde cow Marcella.'

He wanted to live in New York; but without Laura he'd be wretched; he'd find himself working a fourteen hour day; unrelaxed by her company, unrefreshed by her love-making, he'd knock himself to pieces. Better to go on nipping across every few days, which might be physically exhausting, but he wouldn't be cutting himself off from life. A new load would come on his shoulders when he started in on the job of coaxing cash out of the money boys to get Suns' proposition going. He wasn't going hat in hand to New York for a bean. He'd keep this right outside R-U Inc, present it to T.G. and the rest of them as a *fait accompli*, and find the finance himself for such preliminaries as company registration, lawyers' fees, and, most vital of all, the careful creative work that would give tangible shape to the idea, so he had something to put on the table that could be seen and handled while he sold the goods.

He'd have to delegate more. He'd make Andy managing director, shed all administrative work, reserve his time for high-level contacts, concentrate on policy, business-getting, and the new proposition. Suns must be promoted right away to a full executive, and when the new enterprise was buttoned up he'd put him on the board. That would give him about a year, perhaps a bit less, as an executive, before he became a director; and a few noses would be put out of joint, and some of the senior people would feel that they should have been consulted; but hell, he was running a business, not a democracy. The right people in R-U Ltd would be encouraged by such an example of rapid promotion.

He told Laura what he intended to do after he'd explained the scope and implications and potential rewards of Suns' proposals.

'We can't afford to lose Suns,' he said; 'and that's putting it on its lowest level.'

'Don't you always? Can you put business on any other level? Don't make him lose his capacity for life, Jack.'

'What's the exact significance of that?'

'Well, you're beginning to lose yours, and he models himself on you. He has done for ages: you know that. But now he's obviously beginning to think like you.'

'I doubt that. He may have picked up a few superficial mannerisms: Andy and I have noticed that. But nobody knows what he thinks. Look, babe, he's not cut to any pattern.'

'Why have you changed him? He used to be sweet.'

'He's changed himself.' Jack laughed. 'Don't you realize that nobody could change him? He belongs to the class who *make* things happen. He's not and never could be one of the passive mutttons who sit on their asses and just let things happen *to* them. And what the hell are you complaining about? You're in that class too.'

'And so are you, darling; but *I'm* different. I've kept my sense of proportion. I believe you're losing yours, and I'm beginning to think that *Suns* was born without one. Nothing exceeds like success.'

'Babe, that's lifted straight from the naughty 'nineties.'

'It's my own invention, darling, what Oscar said was t'other way round—"nothing succeeds like excess". And you've called me babe twice inside of two minutes, and if you do it again I shall throw things.'

TWO

Very soon after Suns had finished his first spell of field work in Birkenhead, Jack knew that this Negro trainee in his early twenties was far older than his years. With an aggressive maturity of mind and a disciplined imagination, he produced ideas about his own people that no white man could possibly have produced, and was prepared to apply them with the unemotional realism of an electronic brain. He possessed an almost uncanny prescience; an ability to look ahead dispassionately and see what was round the next corner long before he got to it.

'We must push him on fast,' said Jack to Andy. So after he'd done his twelve months as a trainee, he was made a junior executive, with a salary of eleven hundred a year, plus expenses.

He was sent on from Birkenhead to other industrial areas where Negroes had settled, and there were holiday intervals, when he was given trips on two separate occasions to New York and Chicago, ostensibly to see how the offices of R-U Inc were organized in those cities. In New York he was snatched up and toured round by Archi Neston, who introduced him to the night life in Harlem, and insisted on putting him up in the spare room of the large apartment in Bank Street down in the Village, where Maurice Bocardo now kept house for him. (Maurice had followed Archi to New York, and they were still an ostensibly faithful couple, though Archi occasionally strayed.) Those American trips were Andy's idea. 'Let him have a quick look at how they make out over there,' he had advised Jack.

A few months after his second visit to the States the most exciting and productive of all his 'revelations' came to him; a

flash of vision, clarifying and unifying all the ideas he had been nourishing ever since he began his field work in the North.

He had disliked Merseyside. A smell of failure hung about the district. The Birkenhead shipyards, bedevilled by futile labour disputes, were partly idle. The town seemed to be dying on its feet. The fear of unemployment etched lines of worry on grey, unsmiling faces everywhere. The broad Mersey was impossible to see from the Birkenhead shore, and when you crossed to Liverpool on a red-funnelled old-fashioned steam ferry boat, the river looked as grey and unfriendly as the people, and stank of diesel fumes. He remembered it all in repellent detail: the grimy squalor of the streets, the mean muddle of Grange Road, where all the best shops were supposed to be, the lack of bright colour—apart from the electric blue of the buses—the tired, grubby grass of Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Park, and the echoing, sulphurous cavern of Woodside Station, where he arrived on a rainy Sunday evening in July, with Violet Olafa, to find the left luggage office closed and not a taxi to be had for love or money.

How badly Violet had taken it all. She'd quit after two months; but then what could you expect from a bloody African? Only the flimsy barrier of the London School of Economics stood between her and the jungle. All the Africans were too damn close to the jungle. Only West Indians could take civilization, and they would stay in England for keeps, putting colonialism into reverse, for weren't they colonizing a white country, just as white men had colonized Africa? They would stay till England was like America, where the mixture was more thorough than anybody would admit. But that conclusion was unborn when he was teamed up with Violet Olafa in Birkenhead: his American visits were still in front of him.

How badly Violet fell down on the job. He could see her eyes growing dull and distant; her thoughts travelling far away from the environment that was overwhelming her; her powers

of concentration slowly ebbing. Two months, not a day more, was the extent of her usefulness for field work.

He did nothing to help her. Why should he bother himself with one of those jungly types? He never suspected that she had been hopelessly demoralized by their casual affair during the week-end at Doveridge.

They settled into comfortable quarters in Birkenhead, and continued their love-making whenever Suns felt he could spare the time; but he was quite unaware of the unappeasable appetite he had aroused. Conscious of the raging, passionate conflict that was destroying her common sense, and recognizing the rampant animalism of her lust for Suns, she fought grimly to preserve all she had so arduously acquired, all that education had brought her—and she lost. Her body won. She crumpled up, threw everything away, and went back to Ghana, where an academic career, a degree, and her experience at R-U Ltd were of no use at all in begetting and raising a large family, which she did after marrying a gigantic stevedore.

Women—there were always a lot of women; but Suns never allowed them to get in his way. After Violet, he avoided black girls; he preferred white. They were more understanding; he liked their ways; they listened, instead of chattering the whole time. If he married he'd marry white; not a sharp little piece like Jenny Lamprey, but a real good-looker with class and style. But he wasn't prepared to do that favour for any of the English girls he'd met or slept with so far.

The people of his own race disgusted him. He despised them because they wanted so little. They were never without laughter, love, and music, and accepted sub-standards of living because they were so easily satisfied. They were so humble in their happiness, so limited by their innocence, and if they did become ambitious, they tried to take short cuts to big money, which often landed them in trouble with the law, but they were seldom ambitious. They were right out of the world of high-

powered salesmanship and abundance, but they all seemed to think, like Mr Macmillan had said (though not to them), that they'd 'never had it so good'. They were scattered all over the country, in communities with no sense of community. Something or somebody was needed to pull them together; then they could be a target for organized selling, and their standards would rise with their new wants.

Week by week, hundreds of hopeful and often reckless young men and women landed at Southampton, London, Liverpool, Avonmouth, and Glasgow, drawn partly by the alluring optimism of Harold Macmillan's phrase—you could almost catch the jingle of coins in the words—and all they'd heard about the affluent society, and partly because unemployment in the Caribbean islands and the new African states was rising. They wanted a share of Britain's prosperity, and no law as yet restricted or forbade their entry to the promised land. All they found was a land unprepared for their invasion and a people smoulderingly resentful of their presence, while nobody believed that they were going to stay long. Some of them wrote letters home, but only if they were making money, and few of them did.

They read very little, looked at T.V. a lot, carried transistor radio sets about everywhere, listened to music at all hours and in all places, bought discs and played them, made music themselves, sang and enjoyed endless parties, and were cheerful and very noisy neighbours. Suns did an investigation into their reading habits, and found that they were not particularly faithful to any of the national dailies. They weren't interested in news, politics, or policies, which were all concerned with the whites. The newspapers tended to ignore them, unless there was a murder or a riot which involved coloured people. Then they made headlines. 'It's not for us,' was an answer he got again and again when he asked about their favourite newspapers and magazines. They hadn't any favourites. No section of the

press had yet regarded them as consumers of news, entertainment, or politics.

They want a paper of their own, he thought. And then he knew that he had the answer to the problem of turning them into a proper community, building them up as a market, and eventually changing their ideas.

He thought about it for a week, and then wrote a careful memorandum, setting out the case for a weekly news-magazine, designed to appeal exclusively to Negroes in Britain. He knew that such a magazine existed in America. It was called *Ebony*.

The name he suggested was *Jet*.

THREE

'We're not having any of the big Fleet Street boys in on this,' Jack told Andy and Suns. 'Too many deaths and burials lately: they've got discouraged. Not interested in births any more, and they've all got wizened little accountants in the background, wetting their pants with sheer terror if anyone mentions the word enterprise, and scaring everybody to death with figures. Play it safe: that's what Fleet Street stands for today. Nothing there for us. We want somebody that's half-way between amateur and professional, somebody with vision, big interests and boodle, reasonably young—well on the right side of sixty.'

'You're ageing a bit yourself if you think that's young,' said Andy; 'who've you got in mind.'

'Carnaby Jenks.'

Andy whistled. 'Can we do this, Jack? He's a client.'

'That's one of the best reasons why we should. He's used us, knows us, and, so far as he trusts anybody except Carnaby Jenks, I think he trusts us.'

'But can we use our R-U connexions for this? Is it ethical?'

'It's more than ethical—it's enlightened! *We*, Jet Publications Limited, of which you, Suns, and I constitute the board, will be clients of R-U Limited and, when we grow, we'll be clients of R-U Incorporated as well. So we'll have a business tie-up, but not a financial one; and in anticipation of these future happy relations, I, as chairman of R-U Limited, am allowing the board of Jet Publications Limited to meet in my office, till they get their own: now everything's clear, I hope.'

'You've been fairly close to Carnaby Jenks, haven't you? Had him down for week-ends at Doveridge. I just don't know

him as a man: what's behind that pompous little fat front and the pose of superhuman efficiency? I suspect repressions—lots of 'em. He never says what he thinks.'

'But he thinks all right. You suspect repressions because you're a psychologist. A hell of a lot goes on behind those little polished grey pebbles he calls his eyes, and maybe that's why he never says what he thinks. But he'll buy the idea of *Jet* because he wants to buy influence with his millions.'

Jack paused and lit a cigar slowly and very carefully.

'He's our number one prospect,' he continued, talking as if he were thinking aloud. 'He's interested in people, and in spite of his off-putting mug, takes hell's own amount of trouble with them. I don't say he likes them, but he wants to get them a decent deal without being a dedicated do-gooder. He doesn't want to teach them, or reform them, or improve them. To that extent he's a civilized bloke. Then look at his industrial empire: detergents, cosmetics, chemicals, heating appliances and light engineering, electronics, retail distribution as well—he owns that big grocery chain in the Midlands and North. He's not just a financier, manipulating companies. He knows a hell of a lot about every one of his interests, and he's already dipped a toe into publishing. Look at the record there: he's saved two provincial evening papers and a weekly from having their throats cut: he bought 'em, backed 'em, used 'em, and they're on the way back to solvency. Then he rescued a monthly magazine from the general massacre, and acquired that limp religious weekly. And although he's got a London office, he doesn't go in for remote control: he's got offices in Liverpool, Sheffield, and Glasgow, and divides his time between them. He knows where all the real hard work gets done—which isn't down here in the South. He's on the spot, seeing that it's done properly. That's why he called us in first of all, over the god-awful cats-cradle his managers had made of labour relations in those Yorkshire factories. And then he bought a lot of consumer research

from us before he reorganized his grocery chain. You come back every time to his basic interest in people. Presently he'll make a dive into politics, though it's anybody's guess which mud puddle he'll pick.'

'Labour,' said Andy promptly. 'He's a halitostic teetotaler and a non-smoker, and, as I said, I suspect repressions.'

Suns surprised them both by saying quietly: 'He won't have repressions, Mr Mulgrove. He likes Negresses.'

Jack removed his cigar. 'I know you're always sure of your facts, Suns,' he said; 'but I'd like to know how you dug that out. It's a new one on me.'

'I found out when I was in Birkenhead on field work. Our people talk, you know, though not to whites. They talked to me—when I was wearing the right clothes.' Suns grinned. He had heard all the piping hot details of the tycoon's erotic preferences from two of the girls themselves. 'He has a lot of homes,' Suns went on, 'but he doesn't live in any of them. Just drops in as a visitor. He lives in hotels mostly, and when he's at his Liverpool office he has a suite at the Adelphi; but he goes over to Heswell to a slap-up house with a big garden looking across the Dee. It's not in his name. Mrs Kim Toto lives there: it's in her name. She's from the island. Then in Glasgow, he's got a big flat in Kelvinside. Another girl from the island's there. Her name's Decibel Prayou. At least she calls herself Decibel, which isn't a proper name, because she likes it and thinks it's Hollywoodish. There's another at Southport, but I haven't seen her. She's one of the Jungleys—from Free-town. She's Mickey. Then——'

'Just how much do you know about this bird?' Andy interrupted.

'All I could find out, directly I knew he ran four or five lives without getting them mixed up. I knew he was Mr Big up in the north, and I thought it might be useful to know something about him.' ^

'Any time you want to run a side-line, Suns, you could always build up a private inquiry agency: you seem to have a gift for it,' said Jack with conviction. 'Now, tell us exactly *why* did you find all this out?'

'I was on field research, Mr Borrowdell, our people talk, like I said, and it was my job to listen. All I had to do was to chase up a few bits of information.'

'Yes, but *why*?' Jack wanted to know.

'I thought it would be useful to know.'

'And to think that when I had him down for a week-end at Doveridge I was too considerate of his feelings to let him into the maze.' Jack held his cigar above the big glass ash-tray to allow nearly two inches of ash to drop off. 'You can never tell with these old-fashioned north of England types,' he went on, reflectively. 'He's what they call a gradely man, and hard of smiling, but he's our man. Let's look at the advantages. He knows you and me, Andy, and has paid the firm good money, and lots of it, for advice and research. He takes us seriously. Now Suns comes up with this private speciality of his: at least that suggests a favourable predisposition to the idea of *Jet*. Then he's necking around with politics: he'll see a voting block in the potential readership. He'll be tickled by the idea of having a lot of new influence behind the scenes; and presently he'll have had enough of that, and he'll step on to the stage. Then—limelight for the one man who understands the Negro in England. If he makes enough noise he'll have the old school ties and the cloth caps outbidding each other for such an asset. Within two years he'll be in the Honours List. They'll sweeten him up with a K.B.E. Well, is it on?'

'Of course it is, if you can sell him the idea,' said Andy.

'Suns and I will sell it together,' Jack decided.

FOUR

Carnaby Jenks, third generation boss class, was a Merseyside mixture. His great-grandfather, Hezekiah Jenks, a Lancashire man, had worked as a foundry hand in one of the new iron-works in Lower Tranmere, close by the shipbuilding yards. Birkenhead at that time was a growing town with a grandiose street plan, a spreading rash of slums, and an energetic group of enterprising industrialists who employed the slum dwellers. The town had not grown big enough for workers and employers to be widely separated; the exclusive residential developments at Rock Park and Happy Valley between Whetstone Lane and Borough Road came later, and many of the businesses were still small enough for owners to know their employees individually. Hezekiah Jenks was never more than a foundry hand: his son, Israel, was a foundry owner, who, like many a capable man before and since, entered the board room through the bedroom, for he married Jemima, the only child of Jonathan Carnaby, his father's boss.

All the local non-conformist families gave their children Biblical names; and parents were knowledgeable about the meanings of those names. Jemima Carnaby, who knew that her name was Hebrew for dove, was as soft and tender and innocent and yielding as a dove, so taking advantage of her was child's play to Israel Jenks, the tall, muscular, good-looking young shipwright who worked in Laird's yards, and snared his dove in the Baptist chapel which masters and men and their families attended in Christian promiscuity. Within four months of the hurried wedding, a son was born, and christened Eliab at the insistence of Jonathan Carnaby, for the ironmaster was an opti-

mist whose eccentric piety curdled into complex shapes. He believed that the seduction of his daughter was obviously God's will, and, on the whole, providential as he had no son to succeed him in the business: Israel Jenks was therefore a personification of the Divine intention, and as God had thus inspired the act which supplied him with a grandson and the name Eliab meant God is his father, no other name could be considered. This sanctification of what his co-religionists stigmatized as carnal sin outraged a few friends and acquaintances, and caused him to exchange the Baptist faith for the Wesleyan.

Eliab was born in 1857; eleven years later Jonathan Carnaby died, and Israel Jenks inherited the business, which had grown and prospered, for Israel had poured energy and imagination into the foundry, and relieved his father-in-law of many responsibilities and, indeed, of the necessity of thinking at all about business matters. A streak of indolence was entwined with Jonathan Carnaby's habitual optimism; and although of all relatives the father-in-law is notoriously the most sceptical, he always listened to Israel, and usually backed his progressive schemes, which was why the business grew.

Israel had left the shipyards a week before his marriage and was taken into the family firm. A tireless, forceful, ambitious man, diligent in every way. His wife bore him eleven children. Six lived beyond infancy: Eliab, the eldest, and five plain girls, lifelong spinsters, scared of men, and devoted to the more harmful forms of charity and missionary enterprise. They all died before their cosy, futile world ended in 1914.

Eliab, the sole survivor, was still a bachelor when Israel died in 1902. The idea of settling down with one woman was not to be thought of: quite out of the question—at least for a long time. At forty-five he still believed in variety and frequent change.

He had entered the firm at sixteen, and when he inherited the business, it had expanded under his father's management far

beyond the original foundry. There were three other foundries now, two in Yorkshire and one in Stirling, a steel works in Sheffield, and a light engineering plant in the same city, and on the Flintshire side of the Dee estuary the tall brick chimneys of a chemical works vomited noxious yellow fumes which were wafted by the prevailing south-west wind across the water to the villages of Wirral. Carnaby and Company had become Carnaby and Jenks Limited, after Israel was taken in as a partner: and when Eliab at twenty-one was made a partner, the name was changed to Carnaby, Jenks, Son and Company Limited.

Israel had been an autocrat; so was Eliab. The firm was prudently run, and was never in low water financially. They weathered slumps without dismay or loss, and no enterprise they undertook failed to come up to expectations. Long before other industrialists, they had recognized the value of investing in research; they bought good brains, and began to accumulate profitable patents.

Eliab worked just as hard as his father, but avoided respectable domesticity. His recreations, as he told his intimate friends, kept him young. Like his father he was muscular and tough, but half a foot shorter. Both had cold grey eyes and a tinge of red in their hair. By the time he was fifty, Eliab had started to put on weight, and was beginning to find that three establishments—two in London and one in Liverpool—were making too many demands on his powers. The expense never troubled him; he could afford his pleasures, but his enthusiasm was diminishing. Sometimes he thought, rather wistfully, of the settled comfort of one legal establishment. The idea became increasingly tempting; especially after some arduous, demanding night had demonstrated that while he was apparently growing old, his three girls were not. Also he wanted to keep the business in the family, for he had a correct Victorian pride in industrial achievement. So he began to look around for a docile

partner, who would make life cosy, give him a son and heir, and also bring about a profitable union of commercial interests, if the face that went with the interests was bearable at a breakfast table.

He dithered for eighteen months or so, raised the expectations of several mothers with marketable daughters, and ended by marrying Judith, the only child of Powys Jones, a prosperous grocer, who owned shops in Chester, Birkenhead, Liverpool, and Preston. Jones was a self-made man, a widower, and repellantly religious. Like many of the Welsh his brand of Christianity had dark pagan roots, and so far as it resembled any known creed was more like Voodooism than anything else. He was small and stout, with black hair, brown, animal eyes, and an expression of sour disapproval. But he didn't disapprove of Eliab, who was a rich catch for Judith. Both men were in their fifties and Powys was almost out of them. They talked over the marriage as a business proposition. Judith was not consulted: she was told.

Her mother had died when she was five. At nineteen, she seemed a quiet girl, dark and dumpy like her father, with a flat, plain face, rescued from ugliness by a good complexion. Her eyes were a light hazel, large and sly. Eliab never saw them fully until after they were married; because she always looked down.

'She is shy, I tell you, Eliab,' said her father; 'always so shy—yess, and a modest girl.'

Fathers never know.

Eliab discovered that the quiet manner and the downcast look were part of the technique she had worked out for evading the iron rule of her father. She spoke with the lilting, almost falsetto bleat of the Welsh, and Eliab discovered during the first hours of their honeymoon that she was a compulsive talker. She behaved like a dear little innocent thing. At first he was amused by her childish innocence. They were crossing to

Paris; she had never been out of her own country, and prattled away about the strangeness of everything she saw.

Any illusions he had about childish innocence were dispelled after dinner when they had retired to the rococo bedroom of their over-gilded hotel in the Champs Elysées. Eliab was nervous. He had never had to deal with a virgin before, and was mobilizing all his gentler qualities. The hard, ruthless business man was tucked away out of sight. He felt almost fatherly, and was prepared to be patient, explanatory, tactful, considerate, helpful—oh, as virtuous as a missionary about to convert a heathen. But like many a missionary, he was confronted by a savage: a straightforward child of nature with the frankness of the amoral mind.

For the first time she looked directly at him. At the wedding breakfast, on the boat-train and the cross-Channel steamer, even during dinner, her eyes had been fluttering hither and thither, never meeting his, and now he saw their slyness.

‘I know all about this,’ she said bluntly.

Her smile had a slight twist, half-sister to a leer, which gave the lie to innocence, even to youth. She had full, almost negroid lips, and looked terribly knowing.

Eliab wondered how on earth a girl of nineteen could have acquired the experience that lay behind such a smile, and the confidence and contemptuous air of management that went with it, as if she knew all about men and their ways.

She certainly knew a lot; far more than Eliab considered proper, for his ideas about women were strictly Victorian: they should be loose and luscious, or modest and pure. She was as open and shameless as an ape about her appetites, and told him how she had satisfied them.

‘Of course, father never knew anything,’ she assured him; ‘he’d have killed me if he’d found out.’

Eliab couldn’t help laughing at the matter-of-fact tone, though he was already wondering what he’d let himself in for.

'I suppose you'd have married anybody to get away from him,' he said.

'Yes, why not?' she answered. She smiled, and went on: 'Although you're old, you're much better than I expected. We needn't pretend to each other, need we? And you needn't be nervous—not of me. Now come on—you like it, don't you? So do I.'

It was all so horribly mature. He couldn't imagine how the devil she'd learnt not only all the old tricks, but several quite new to him, apparently of her own invention. Only nineteen now, and she had begun, she said, at fifteen, with the school boot boy, who was in great demand and innocent enough to believe that it was part of his job. With the guile of Satan, she had never given herself away.

'I always promised myself a holiday from covering things up when I got married,' she told Eliab. (He wondered later what that implied.)

Although destitute of religion and moral scruples, he was shocked, and she knew it.

'Jars on you a bit, doesn't it?' she remarked. 'You'll get used to it—but you must play fair. I want the whole lot from you—all the time. Nothing on the side.'

But no mistress he'd ever had gave him the ferocious ecstasies of this black-haired Welsh primitive, with the large mouth and the sly eyes.

Judith. My God, she grew on him. He didn't want anything on the side: she was enough: more than enough. Far more than a profitable link with a grocery business that would come his way when her father died. It was certainly more than he had bargained for at his age.

Ten months after the marriage, they had a son, whom they christened Carnaby.

There were no other children, and when Carnaby was twenty-two Eliab died and, preternaturally staid and serious,

but with all his mother's receptive, flexible imagination, the young man stepped into control of a web of industrial and commercial interests.

He had not been moulded and polished by a public school: he had a good education at a grammar school, with a polytechnic afterwards, where he learnt accountancy, followed by a year in a lawyer's office. His father and his maternal grandfather approved.

A silent boy, short and lumpish like his father, but with his father's grey eyes, and that faint touch of red in the hair that came from Israel Jenks. He was silent from choice in his noisy home, filled with the sing-song voices of his mother and her innumerable friends. She was not only a compulsive talker, but an extravagant spender, with a passion for building extensions on to the large, vulgar Victorian Gothic castle they inhabited, which stood on the Heswall Hills overlooking central Wirral and the valley of the Fender. She wanted everything: especially if it were new. Motor cars, a different one every year, masses of clothes, and lots and lots of parties. She was indifferent to social position: she was a grocer's daughter, and never pretended to be anything else, for she was also a millionaire's wife. The Jenks' fortune had grown to vast dimensions during the 1914-18 war, and Eliab was given an O.B.E. for his services at the Ministry of Munitions. He might have had a knighthood, only Judith had never displayed the slightest deference for the string-pullers who dished out the honours. She didn't want to be Lady Jenks. And her private life was by that time rather too free for her to be socially acceptable even in the relatively loose 'twenties.

So Eliab died, and O.B.E. followed his name in the inscription, incised and gilded on the Aberdeen granite tombstone that was erected at great cost in the exclusive cemetery near Frankby where he was buried. And Carnaby Jenks reigned in his stead.

There were no blood claimants to the industrial throne. His grandfather, Powys Jones, had died the year before, muttering incantations, and refusing all nourishment except milk which, he insisted, was pure, like the Milk of the Word.

Carnaby Jenks was soon alone with his inheritance, for his mother was killed in an aeroplane crash after a year of unrestrained widowhood. He was happy to be alone. People were animals—to be used, and he liked to see them perform as he used them.

He believed that he could use Jack Borrowdell and this nigger, Sunley Alpion.

He didn't know that Jack and Suns had come to the same conclusion about him. They had made their sale.

FIVE

Carnaby Jenks never said a needless word during business hours. His Welsh blood inspired his imagination, not his tongue, though when he chose to talk—which was seldom—he could hold an audience, small or large, with his brittle, expressionless words. Those he addressed could almost forget that the voice of big business was speaking. He was an unromantic adventurer who never exaggerated or understated a case and described the most exciting and unusual projects with the factual dullness of a sanitary inspector reporting to a local council on the state of the drains. But his penetrating assessments of men and situations were remembered. He responded to constructive suggestions without exhibiting a trace of enthusiasm. A broad, prodigal stream of ideas welled from his mind, and he welcomed as tributaries the ideas of other men. He rewarded their authors, and was generous but not lavish.

Most of the time he listened to other people with a dead-pan concentration that shook even hardened industrialists and politicians, who, embarrassed by that unwavering scrutiny, began to wonder if their fly-buttons were undone. The full-lipped, sensual mouth he had inherited from his mother was as impassive as that of an Egyptian Pharaoh carved in granite. His eyes seldom blinked. His hands, resting palm downwards on his leather desk top, were inert and gave nothing away. As his feet were tucked under the knee-hole of his large mahogany desk, and the desk front hid them, nobody ever knew that when he was interested he twiddled his toes inside his shoes. (He used the same type of desk in all his offices.) He seldom interjected comments, preferring to let a chain of silences entangle

those who came to him with propositions, so that they soon talked themselves out. He interrupted only when repetition was threatened. His economy of speech and rationed movements intimidated people who didn't know him; so did his abrupt question: 'What are the facts?'

Abstemious by choice because he disliked the taste of alcohol and tobacco, he had always been rich enough to indulge such sobriety without losing caste as a business man. He was no puritan. As the son of two pagan hedonists he had never been exposed to the rigours of religion. As Andy observed, when he knew more about him, he was happily free from any form of superstition—religious, political, or scientific. He had an open mind, not the sort that carried a through traffic of crack-pot trivialities, but critically receptive. He was indifferent to luxurious cooking, but liked plain food and lots of it; rejecting games as a futile waste of time, he despised the golf-course conferences that led so often to ill-considered deals, and had no use for bright young men who hoped to improve their business prospects by improving their game. ('The only way anybody's business prospects are improved are by work, common sense, and learning to distinguish what's important and what isn't,' he told Suns when he had seen more of him.) He seldom read a book, went to a theatre, or looked at a picture. Art, he believed, was a poor imitation of living, a second-hand interpretation dished out by unstable wastrels whose lives were conspicuously uncomfortable or ill-organized. He preferred to do his own living. Nobody suspected that when he was bored in business hours, as he often was, he evoked erotic visions, re-enacting past experiences in luscious detail, or evolving new and warmly enticing ideas which clamoured for trial. His private life was as well arranged as his business, so wherever he was, in the Midlands, Scotland, or London, he could try out new ideas with a responsive partner.

He had first been attracted to West Indian girls by the almost

Welsh lilt in their voices. Subconsciously they reminded him of his mother, whom he had adored, possibly because she consistently ignored and neglected him. Immersed in her loves and luxuries, she seemed hardly aware of his existence until she was a widow and, in Suns' words, Carnaby became THE ONE WHO. He controlled her supplies. Even then she was honest enough not to simulate an affection she didn't feel; and he respected that honesty.

He much preferred West Indians. African girls had different voices, more pride, and an independence of spirit that was barely distinguishable from arrogance. He paid off Mickey, the last of his Africans, a few weeks before he'd agreed to back *Jet*. She didn't complain. He always paid handsome compensation. He called it 'winding up' money. Now he had three island girls, and Mickey's flat in Southport was empty. He'd find another tenant soon. Four was a comfortable investment in variety.

A few weeks after Jet Publications Limited moved into a suite of offices in High Holborn, Carnaby Jenks had to sack another of his girls. He did so with reluctance, for she was an inventive little thing, but she had to go. After attending an afternoon board meeting as chairman of Jet Publications, he decided to spend the evening at her small, rather garishly furnished house in Hampstead, before returning to Liverpool on the night sleeper.

'Who's your coloured friend called Alpion, Carny?' she asked him after she'd made coffee and they were sitting side by side on a broad divan, covered in a vivid purple fabric. She always called him Carny.

'Why do you ask?' he wanted to know.

'Oh, there was a T.V. interview last week with a Mr Borrowdell—all about a new weekly magazine, and he said you and Mr Sunley Alpion were all in it together. You never tell me anything, Carny.'

He had been invited to appear on T.V., but didn't want to

destroy the image of the quiet man behind the scenes. The only piece of personal publicity he'd ever had was his appearance in the Birthday Honours in 1946 for his war-time services to industry, and, like his father, he rated an O.B.E. If he ever went into politics, he'd go in at the top—by invitation. A peerage. Nothing less. No rough-and-tumble electioneering for him. But he distrusted the endless talk that went with politics. He dismissed it as 'piss and wind', distrusting the men who poured and puffed out all those words. So it was Jack who figured on a popular television feature, and was asked tendentious questions.

'And I suppose, Mr Borrowdell, that this magazine, *Jet*, will be a very good thing for you and your publishing company?'

'Not at first: not at all, possibly. It'll be years before we begin to break even.'

'Then if you're not going to make a profit, why are you doing it?'

'Nobody else has lifted a finger to give our coloured fellow-Englishmen something of their own: not even you people.'

'Oh, then it's pure altruism on the part of you and Mr Carnaby Jenks and Mr Andrew Mulgrove and your coloured director, Mr Sunley Alpion. Do you then envisage an educational publication that will raise the standards of coloured people in this country?'

'No. We wouldn't be so damned impertinent. We want to entertain them, interest them, and give them something that belongs to them. They're the new English, and, by and large, better Englishmen than many of us, with better manners.'

'Mr Borrowdell, thank you very much.'

Jack grinned. 'Any time, pal,' he said into the mechanized smile of dismissal.

That's what the slim little West Indian girl had seen and heard.

'Sunley's surely a funny name,' she went on. 'Who is he?'

‘A business associate.’

‘I have a brother called Suns. He was the clever one.’

The moment the words were out she knew they were fatal. She’d never talked about her family before; Carny wasn’t interested; but he was when she mentioned Suns. Jack and Andy had used no other name for that quiet, competent Negro director of their joint enterprise.

Within ten days she was on a plane to the island, her passage paid one way, with a gift of five hundred pounds, the purchase price of her promise to stay on the island for keeps.

So Sophie Alpy went home, feeling rich, and, as Suns had once predicted to Jack, told them all about it; but she hadn’t had time to find out whether, as she suspected, Mr Sunley Alpion was really her clever brother. So she had no news of him to give her parents and brothers and sisters. She was sorry to disappoint her mother, who mooned about the house singing over and over again two lines from an old song:

I wonder where my baby is tonight;

I wonder why my baby doesn’t write. . . .

But Suns never wrote. He was far, far too busy. And he was learning fast from Carnaby Jenks, acquiring some of those steel-hard, old-English business ways and meannesses that flourish in the North, where masters and men are as tough as the climate.

SIX

'For God's sake do something about Suns, darling,' said Laura when that putative tycoon had left Doveridge on a sunny May morning in a splendour of well-cut tweeds and pale cream Jaguar, booked for a conference with Carnaby Jenks. Correct, though faintly exotic, for Suns allowed himself some carefully controlled reversion to his old island taste for colour and pattern; he felt he could afford to; he had arrived—well, nearly. Also Carnaby Jenks sometimes wore ties that would have been considered intemperate even in a Jamesport dance hall—his only concession to art, as hard on the eye as the décor of his love-nests. Suns knew exactly when his clothes should be inconspicuous, and when he could let himself go a bit. He was in big business now, and learning fast.

'What's worrying you about Suns?' asked Jack lazily. It was Sunday, and he was treating himself to one completely idle day under pressure from Laura before she delivered him to London airport for a night flight to Chicago.

'He's breaking out all over in Jenks.'

'You can't stand Carnaby, can you?'

'I loathe Carbuncle.'

'One of these days you'll call him Carbuncle without knowing what you've said.'

'It was bad enough when Suns was putting on the Jack Borrowdell act,' she continued; 'now he's mixing up two parts, and the results are ghastly. And he will keep on barking out, "What are the facts?" Darling, d'you even *begin* to understand that he's almost destroyed as a human being?'

'Now, honey, wait a minute. . . .'

'Honey! Oh, God! I suppose you're getting all set for those United bloody States and have to do the li'l ole plantation stuff on me.'

'You're pretty bitchy this morning.'

'I'm jealous, if you really want to know and really care a damn about anything I feel.'

Jack lit a cigar, lay back in the long cane garden chair, and watched the spirals of violet smoke quivering in uncertain ascent. For May it was warm, and they sat in a sheltered spot. The dark green walls of the maze shone in the morning light: the house glowed with the soft gold that sunshine coaxes through the grey of Cotswold stone. Jack, with a light conscience, said:

'What's biting you?'

'I'm jealous of all that big, beastly business is doing to you and Suns. You used to carry it off with a heigh-ho, and laugh at all those damned, dedicated Yanks, but now you take everything so seriously. Your sense of humour has died on you. You're hardly *there* most of the time.'

'Be fair, babe. Business takes up a sizeable chunk of your life too, and it'll take up a hell of a lot more now you've won that Jamesport hospital competition.'

'But I'm doing creative work: all the difference in the world between your predatory grind and my fun.'

'Are you trying to tell me that running a damn great architectural practice isn't business and grinding hard work at that?'

'One takes the business side of it in one's stride: nobody who does creative work really *works*, in the sense that you and Suns and that little horror from Liverpool work. We have all the fun in life, like the hunters and nomads used to, the people who were free, while all the monotonous grubbing after a living was done by those who dug and planted and grew food. They were slaves: so are business people, though they won't admit it.'

'If you go on like this, I shall have to have a drink.'

'Not at eleven in the morning you won't. And another thing—you're drinking far too much, darling. I haven't said this before, but you are. And it's only because you're always tired; always getting over some damned tough time, or recovering from a long-distance flight. Jack, my sweet, you won't last. You'll go the way of that old bugger T.G.'

'He certainly isn't the man he was before his coronary.'

'You certainly aren't the man you were when I married you.'

Jack smoked in silence for a while, then said: 'We all grow.'

'You're not growing: you're shrinking. Look, darling. I shall have to go to the island quite a lot, and when my scheme for the Jamesport hospital group gets under way I must spend two or three weeks there every so often. I know I've won the competition, but I'm going to be on the spot to see that the locals don't start chipping bits off. Why not come with me? Have a real break and let's be idle for a few weeks. Throw it all away for a bit.'

Jack shook his head. 'I can't at this stage. Not with the work on *Jet* and the business on top of it all. Although I've told New York about it, I haven't really sold it properly to T.G.—not yet.'

'How I hate those words, "not at this stage". It's like that other tired beast, "the time is not ripe". But I can see it's no good.' There were tears in her eyes. 'I believe that you'd stop if I made you jealous,' she went on. 'Really jealous.'

'You haven't for years—because we're sensible.'

'But you've stopped being sensible. You're being unfaithful to me every day and every night too. And it's not with a woman, either: I wouldn't mind *that*. I could get you back from any woman. I can't get you back from your damned business.'

She wondered, as she spoke, whether anything, any situation, any man would make Jack so healthily jealous that he'd leave that arch-bitch, big business. Suns might be the man. They

understood each other far better now; though she still mourned him as one of her failures.

She was right about his fresh set of mannerisms. Carnaby Jenks was his new model. Those pregnant silences—so telling compared with the pre-coronary volubility of T.G.—and that dead-pan look. No Negro can make his eyes resemble grey stones under a film of sea-water, but he can make them as opaque as smoked glass. With expressionless, unblinking eyes, disciplined gestures, and economy of words, he sought to impress the staff, white and black, of *Jet*. They called him 'the carbon copy', though not to his face. Only one man did that: Tot Pacey, a talented Negro photographer who got tight one night. He was much too talented to be fired, but felt so put out because *Suns* ignored the incident, that he went on a prolonged binge with some friends in Brixton, drove his car into a bus, hit a policeman, and went out of circulation for some months.

Publication date was still nine months off when *Suns* drove away from Doveridge on that Sunday in mid-May. The company had been formed the previous August, Carnaby Jenks had come in with his millions in November and was Chairman of the board.

'We'll publish at the end of February, year after next,' he announced at their first policy meeting.

'That gives us plenty of time,' said Andy.

'Fatal words,' Jenks snapped out; 'there's never plenty of time. There's either enough, or not enough.'

They had re-examined the name, and considered alternatives. *Sable* was rejected, *Raven* was off-beat; and they came back unanimously to *Jet*. As Jack said, there was an up-to-the-minute urgency about the very sound of the word.

They discussed circulation and readership targets.

'It'll go over big with the left-wing intellectuals and Labour boys and girls who have to pretend to know all about Negroes,' Andy observed.

'They hardly count from a circulation point of view,' said Jack. 'They haven't any money, and won't mean a thing to advertisers.'

'Back to the point, please,' said Jenks. 'White readership may represent a small marginal benefit for advertisers; but we're not concerned with it. Every page of *Jet*, editorial and advertisements, must be for Negro readers. Our promotion material must make that clear: our advertisement department must insist that the big agencies give us specially angled ads for consumer products, not just adaptations of national campaigns that are aimed at whites. We must refuse advertisements that don't do this.'

Jack whistled. 'Will we sell *any* space at all on those terms?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'It's a tough line to take.'

'Yes.'

Those affirmatives, dropped out like lead weights, crushed Jack's resiliency, so good-humouredly he sat back and let Suns do the talking.

'This isn't a job for whites,' Suns said; 'we don't want their preconceived notions about what my people like. All we want from the whites we employ is know-how about make-up and printing. Outside that—nothing. We must find men and women with talent from the islands and Africa who're over here in the wrong jobs; young people who can write and think. But none of the chip-on-the-shoulder lot: we don't want politics or under-privileged moans, or protest stuff about the colour bar and the way the Trade Unions push our people around whenever they can. We'll ignore all that. We must give 'em straight entertainment, fashions for men and women, lots about clothes and music and gadgets and cheap cars and stories and poetry too—our poetry, none of the egg-head stuff about dog-shit and washing-up. No misery. Lots of colour and lots about places

where they can see a bit of colour and hear music and have fun.'

Carnaby Jenks agreed. 'I'm with you one hundred per cent,' he'd said. That young man saw things as they were, without blinkers or tinted glasses. People who saw things straight and knew what should be done were rare. Borrowdell and Mulgrove talked too much: experience had made them too knowing, too reliant on their powers of persuasion. They had their uses, but Suns, knowing by nature and instinct, had power. Power should never be allowed to run to waste.

Those still grey eyes considered Suns without prejudices, without illusions, and without warmth: Carnaby Jenks recognized one of his own kind. He wanted him on his side. He particularly wanted a man who was in touch with the new England that would soon emerge, who knew what the new Englishmen would be like.

He always addressed Suns formally as Mr Alpion. He left the recruiting of the Negro staff in his hands, while he bought what was needed from the talent flung on the street by mergers, closures, and sudden deaths in the newspaper and magazine business. Experienced brains were going cheap. *Jet* got some of the best, on the technical side.

One evening in the sitting-room of his suite at the Adelphi, Jenks asked Suns if he had made any money.

'Only what I earn and what I've saved, Mr Jenks.'

'Have you invested what you've saved?'

'Yes—in National Savings units, as many as I'm allowed to hold. They're tax free. I keep the rest on deposit in my bank.'

'On deposit?' Carnaby Jenks was almost shocked.

'All told it doesn't amount to more than eleven hundred pounds.'

'You should make it work for you. Have you thought of studying the market?'

'No. I don't gamble, and I know nothing about the stock market.'

'It's difficult not to make money just at present if you have a little to invest.'

He gave some advice. Suns must be built up. He'd get more out of him if he was relieved of the money troubles that force so many young men to waste their energy.

Suns took the advice. Money breeds. Investors, like other people, had never had it so good. The advice was renewed from time to time, and Suns increased his possessions and raised his standards.

The Jaguar came first; then a flat in Westminster, not far from Jack's. More clothes. More expensive girls, but nothing exclusive. An occasional day off to drive to some place he wanted to see. But he rationed those holidays. He was now on the board of R-U Ltd, and divided his time between that company and Jet Publications. For R-U he planned and directed a potential readership survey that was to serve *Jet*, so he doubled the part of client and executive.

Always writing a new chapter of his success story.

Almost a tycoon.

'Almost inhuman,' said Laura.

SEVEN

Early in June, Jack and Suns flew to New York to explain the plans for publishing, promoting, and distributing *Jet*. Some of the vice-presidents of R-U Inc felt that the Corporation had been slighted by their London colleagues. An enterprise in a new field had been set up, financed entirely with British capital, without as much as a by-your-leave from New York; but although temperatures were climbing in the city, with humidity to match, and everybody had a right to feel irritable, nobody seemed to be. They were effusively congratulatory. The British company, always expanding and making bigger profits each year, was too valuable an asset to be disturbed. Jack Borrowdell, with more influence and independence than any of them, now brought them Jet Publications Limited as a client, able to commission research projects, not only in Britain (which they had already done), but throughout the Commonwealth, when *Jet* went out after circulation overseas.

T.G. gave them a shock. He was recovering from a second coronary. They found a shrunken husk of a man, without a flicker of vitality, like a house unlit and ruinous. He spoke little, nodding continuously, struggling to concentrate. He had a few spasms of lucidity, and in one of them said to Jack: 'Your notion has paid off.' And he nodded his head at Suns. He managed to put a range of expression into his nodding, for his hands, as slack and immobile as dead flat fish, could no longer make gestures.

T.G. approved of everything; but Suns suspected the excessive admiration of the vice-presidents and other top-level boys. Their superlatives were danger signals for Jack.

'They're sharpening their knives for you, Mr Borrowdell,' he said when they were back in England. Laura had picked them up from London airport and driven them to Doveridge after a Saturday flight from New York. They were sitting in the shade of the big sycamore on the lawn before dinner, and Jack was pulling himself together with a quadruple Scotch. He felt stale, flattened out, and enormously weary. Suns as usual stuck to tomato juice.

'They've been sharpening those knives ever since I was made a vice-president of the main outfit,' said Jack; 'if they go on long enough they'll wear out the blades.'

'They want *yet* to fail,' Suns told him; 'they don't believe in it; and they hope it'll pull you down too. Look, Mr Borrowdell, this is only the third time I've been in the States, but I pick up something from Americans that you can't, and do you know why?'

'Tell me, don't tell him,' said Laura; 'it'll give me a sharp knife too, when I want to puncture some of his blown-up American ideas.'

'What's on your mind?' asked Jack.

'You know the States far better than I do,' said Suns; 'but what's happened there must happen here one day—a long time ahead, maybe, but it'll certainly happen. In America today, all Negroes are half-white, and most white Americans are half-black. That surprised me when I first went there, for it's not that way in the island. Of course we have a big dose of white in the black, but there's no black in the white—not to notice anyway. Do you see now where I have a real pull?'

Jack recalled Andy's deliberate attempt to rile T.G. once with a prediction of a French-speaking mulatto America. Suns was right: that half-and-half world was well on the way. The American melting-pot was over three centuries old—the Irish and mixed European ingredients were comparatively recent; Negroes had been there with the English for twelve generations.

'Go on,' he said, 'so you've an edge on the Yanks—tell me.'

'Just this. Naturally *I* know how the black half thinks. All this toot about status symbols is a bit of black thinking: there's no difference between a bright suit and a silk tie that used to make me feel ten feet tall and a Cadillac that makes an executive feel like a million dollars, and spreads around the idea that maybe he's worth that much. That's the Negro breaking through.'

'Or your cream Jaguar if it comes to that,' Laura put in; 'but there's nothing new or specially Negro or American about it. The status symbol's as old as civilization; the history of architecture and clothes and furniture proves that. Negroes didn't invent it. You're unfair to your race, Suns. You're always inclined to be, as though you despise them. I've noticed that; it's one of the things about you that I don't like.'

'I'm not knocking my race—Laura.' There was always a hesitant catch in his voice before he got her Christian name out, especially when Jack was there, though he'd used it now for a long time. 'We could do a lot better than whites, when we grow up, and I think we'll grow up here in England. You're an adult people; and how often have I heard you and other folks say that the Americans aren't? That's because Americans know they've got a black half. Why else do they drink and drug and die of overwork? Isn't it to prove to themselves that they're really grown up, though they know their black half keeps them back?'

'An attractive theory which explains some of our American colleagues,' said Jack, 'but Laura's right—you do tend to be unfair to your race.'

'Not a bit of it, Mr Borrowdell. I see them plain—I'm one of them. Negroes haven't grown up because they've never had it really tough——'

'Utter balls!' Laura interrupted; 'never had it tough? What

about the bloody history of slavery ever since that old pirate John Hawkins started his kidnapping racket in Africa?’

‘That sort of toughness, yes of course; plenty of cruelty from white men; but we’ve never had it tough with climate. We’ve been held back by the sun. Even in America. We’re happy in the sun, and if they’re happy, that’s enough for most people.’

‘Up to a point I agree,’ said Jack; ‘and it applied when most Negroes in America lived in the South—but what about New York, and the north generally? American winters are damned tough.’

Suns used the superior smile that so often replaced his natural, happy grin. ‘New York is about the same latitude as Naples and Ankara. It’s almost sub-tropical. Look what we left behind there yesterday. Everybody thinking of their summer vacation; and in three weeks you’ll fry your eggs on the sidewalk. *I* can take that. So can any Negro. Certainly American winters are tough, but over there you do *know* that the hot weather is coming—real heat. Now here, winters are tougher than you’ll ever admit—for Negroes they can be hell, but in America you look forward to a summer and you get it. You don’t here. It’s never so hot that the sun really gets through to laze you up. I reckon nearly everything the British have done in the world, they owe to this climate, and if it’s done that for you, it can do the same for us. We’ll grow up properly here, and when we’re mixed with you, that mixture will run the world from here, like you used to.’

‘But, damn it, Suns, that makes the idea of *Jet* out of date before it’s started.’

‘Not a bit of it, Mr Borrowdell. *Jet* is for here and now: to give the new Negro communities in this country something of their own, something they can talk about and laugh over, which really belongs to them, and isn’t just a share of something that’s mainly for whites. They haven’t any social shape at the

moment, and they won't become proper consumers till they have one. The half-and-half mixture won't come for a century or more—that's way ahead. This is something they can have now.' He paused. 'Social identity,' he added.

'And it'll help to ease the inferiority complex out of them,' Laura said, and then regretted her words.

'We haven't got an inferiority complex, Laura,' he said, with a trace of impatience; 'most of us haven't got a sense of direction—that's all. But I've said all this before.'

'You have indeed,' Jack observed; 'and Carnaby swallowed the lot and asked for more. You've got under his skin all right, Suns.'

'Hide, you mean,' said Laura; 'he looks like a shop-soiled rhinoceros. But how do *you* feel about all this mixing you've been talking about, Suns? How do you feel as a person?'

'If you mean, would I marry a Negress, the answer's no,' he replied. 'If I marry at all, it'll be a white girl. That wouldn't be difficult.'

Somebody like Laura, he thought. She was the only kind of woman he could ever marry; somebody with a mind as good or nearly as good as his own. A pity she was so much older than he was. He could whistle her away from Jack any time. He'd known *that* since his first night at Doveridge. But there it was: far too many years between them. Not that she seemed old; she'd stay young: he couldn't see her enclosed in a net of wrinkles or heavy with folds of fat: that's how Julie would age. Julie: he hadn't thought of her for months.

As if she'd tuned in on his mind, Laura startled him by asking:

'And what about your girl friend on the island, Suns? You once told me you loved her very much.'

'I've had others since,' he answered carelessly. The ques-

tion jolted him. He turned to Jack and said: 'I know why the big boys in New York would like to pull you down, Mr Borrowdell. They're scared of you. They think you're after T.G.'s job when he quits, and they'll gang up against you.'

'They do already,' said Jack. 'D'you suppose I don't know that?'

'Of course you do—but you may have to wait a long, long time. T.G. will stay on as President till he dies on his feet. It's all he knows. It's his life-line. They can't get rid of him, and he may last till you're tired of waiting.'

'He's absolutely right, Jack,' said Laura, welcoming this new ally; 'why don't you stop now? While you can. That bloody old man's indestructible: you aren't.'

'There's more in *Jet* than R-U International,' said Suns.

'Is this a coalition?' Jack's smile was tired. He was half-asleep and felt that he was being bullied unfairly by two people who were much too wide awake.

'Course it is,' said Laura; 'three minutes old. Darling, do come with me to the island. I ought to go to Jamesport at the end of July to see this character Mobo Santossa—Suns, tell me about him. I shall have a lot to do with him when we start building. He's chairman of the Hospital Committee.'

'He's chairman of everything in sight,' said Suns. 'The part of his head that works best is his mouth. He's just another politician.'

'Have you ever wanted to go back home, Suns?'

'I *am* home.'

That would have worried her if he hadn't sounded so confidently irritable. She knew then why up to now he'd been one of her failures. She was too damn considerate; had studied his feelings too much; had choked him with the cream of kindness. To hell with it. She said:

'Back to the island I mean, idiot!'

His smile returned. 'No. Not once. But when we go out after Commonwealth circulation and special features for *Jet*, I'll go back; but it'll be business.'

'Tell me more about Santossa. He'll be a big man when the island gets independence.'

'He'll never be a big man: he'll always be a noisy one. But I know nothing about him, apart from what I've read, and from interviews I've seen on T.V., when he's been over here for conferences.'

Jack had fallen asleep. Laura gently detached the half-empty glass from his hand and put it on the grass beside him. She beckoned to Suns, and they strolled away together. Suns was thinking that he ought to know more about Santossa and what was happening in the island: it would soon be an independent state, and he could find out all he wanted to know without going there before he was ready.

They stopped at the gate of the maze. Laura fished out her key from the pocket of her tight-fitting green slacks, and they went in.

'Could you find your way out?' she asked.

'Yes. I can remember the plan—like you can.'

They reached the centre. Satyr and nymph, frozen in their posture of delight, laughed an invitation.

Laura said: 'I know that Jack won't come with me to Jamesport, but you could.'

'Yes,' he agreed; 'I could. But I'm not going to.'

Later he said: 'You've a fine tail, Laura.'

'I like it that way,' she told him.

'It's our way.'

Normally he didn't pay compliments; he took what he wanted and left it at that; but Laura was very special. And this new paragraph he had just written in his success story was very special too. ♣

He recalled how, years ago it seemed to be, he'd been in awe

of Jack as Laura's owner; how he'd revered him as THE ONE WHO. Now he, Sunley Alpion, was THE ONE WHO.

He looked at her as she stood, still unclothed, by that lithe bronze group. She saw the cool, possessive confidence of his glance.

At that moment they both felt sorry for Jack.

RETURN

ONE

The Comet swept in a wide curve over Jamesport. The flat roofs of the buildings, spotted with water tanks, resembled dirty white dominoes. A square, white-plastered church tower, crowned with a spire of bright red glazed tiles, rose above the two-storeyed level of the shops and offices that lined the grid of streets. Then the ramshackle city sank behind groves of palms as the plane lost height, passed over the harbour, and circled out to sea again before coming in to land at the airport. Suns had a glimpse of a pale grey frigate, her white ensign drooping, flawlessly mirrored in still blue water; then they touched down, and he descended from the plane, feeling for the first time in six years the welcome caress of heat—real comforting heat that enveloped him; body, soul, and mind, threatening to melt caution, prudence, and all the business virtues he'd acquired. 'This sunlight had vitality: he'd forgotten that the sky could be so deeply blue or colours so intense.

He presented his new British passport.

'Staying long, Mr Alpion?' asked the official. (Spotless white uniform and plenty of gold lace.)

'Just a short business trip—maybe two weeks, maybe three.'

'Hope you enjoy your stay.'

A quick passage through the Customs. The Tourist Ministry was making everything easy. Independence Day was just a week off, and Mobo Santossa, Prime Minister of the island Government and President designate of the republic to come, wanted all visitors to feel that they were welcome before and after that event—especially after.

Laura was waiting for him in a pool of shadow beside a sage green Rover.

'You're smiling!' she exclaimed. 'Suns, I thought you'd forgotten how to. It must be your old home.'

'It might be you,' he suggested.

The porter stowed the matching set of blue fibreglass suitcases in the boot, got a ten shilling note for his trouble, and touched his cap. Once that sum had meant two days of wealth to Suns; now money didn't matter, only power, and, to a lesser extent, people.

He got in the car beside Laura, and they sped along the white concrete causeway that linked the airport to the island, on to the Jamesport by-pass, then up a winding road to the hills where Laura had a big, cool country house, from which she could see her glittering group of hospital blocks, four miles away. The best work she'd ever done, though the delays and obstruction and crass stupidity she'd battled with had nearly defeated her. In three days the great building would be opened by Royalty, blessed by the Bishop of the island, and the fact that hardly any trained staff was available to run it would not be mentioned in any of the innumerable speeches that would bubble out of the island's future rulers.

Laura had rented that house nearly two years ago, when it became obvious that unless she was on the spot frequently and made constant but unpredictable visits, the building would never be finished. The hospital was already six months late, and only ready for opening because she had convinced the Prime Minister that his reputation and that of the new republic depended on giving this proof of Negro progress to the world. Mobo Santossa had assumed for many years that speeches were a substitute for actions, and Laura's insistence on his personal intervention in all kinds of practical affairs to accelerate work on the hospital flattered his vanity. He talked of 'our joint task as architects', and told everybody how much he had

contributed to Miss Corbel's design, while Laura assured him that if he hadn't been a great statesman he'd have been a great architect, and he believed her. Despite his political guile he was at heart a gullible, innocent child.

Suns had flown over to open a local office for *Jet* in Jamesport. They were extending their circulation to the Commonwealth. Carnaby Jenks had predicted that within four years they would break even financially, and thereafter begin to make profits. He had taken Suns away from the R-U organization, loaded him with responsibilities, observed his progress, and trusted him. They were both feeling their way in a new venture, and both made mistakes—small errors of judgment, which they discussed with complete frankness always. There were no precedents to guide them, only their belief that the 'wind of change' might suddenly rise to gale force in England, where nobody would think it was more than a passing gust, until all kinds of things were blown down. Then they would be ready to harness its power.

Three of the London staff of *Jet* had been on the island for over a week, making advance arrangements to cover Independence Day celebrations. Tot Pacey, their star photographer, all six foot five of him, periodically sober, and always reinstated by Suns whenever he went on a bat and got into trouble (Tot still laughed at Suns but was now devoted to him); Tiliv Bawa, another photographer, a lean, lively girl from Ghana; and their best descriptive writer, Tommy Arthur, who had worked as a cub reporter on the *Jamesport Gazette* before emigrating to England where he gained experience as an unskilled labourer, a tout for a coloured brothel in Notting Hill, a railway porter, a waiter in a flash road house, a bus conductor, and a writer of lyrics for would-be pop singers. Laura had arranged for Suns to have a private talk with Santossa at her house the next day, and Tommy Arthur would be on hand, to be introduced if Suns thought it was the right moment to do so. (Santossa was

touchy about Negro reporters: he couldn't believe that they had any standing on any paper—even on *Jet*.)

Suns had never entered a large house on the island before: they were all owned by whites, for there were no wealthy Negroes. He had expected lavish luxury, but found instead a cool simplicity, soft colourings, unobtrusive comfort, and efficiency. The house was large, with a broad balcony supported on elegant Tuscan columns, painted cream, encircling the first floor, and casting a deep band of shadow which quelled the glare of sunlight in the ground floor rooms.

A white-coated Negro opened the car door for Laura and collected the luggage.

'Tired, Suns?' she asked as they went inside.

'I've been thirteen hours in the air, and slept for eight of them. I'm not tired, but I'd like to freshen up and change.'

He joined her a few minutes later, and they sat by a swimming pool under a green awning in deck chairs, Laura with a rum collins, and Suns with a tall glass of crushed limes and ice. He wore a short-sleeved shirt of sea-island cotton; she admired the modelling of his arms, hoping that he would be tempted to touch her, but he didn't. He seemed to be unaware of her proximity; certainly unexcited by it.

Unexpectedly he said: 'A pity Jack couldn't come along too.'

'Did you really want him here?'

'No.'

'Always frank, aren't you, unless it pays not to be. He's never been near the place.'

'Why not?'

'You wouldn't know, because we don't make it obvious; but I lost him—two years ago.'

He glanced at her inquiringly.

'Those bloody Yanks and Carbuncle and you have won,' she

told him. 'He's no life left, no time for anything except business; and I'm not business—just a bit of animated bedroom furniture which he uses with about as much interest as he uses a toothbrush or a water closet. We used to have fun together, and then there was less and less time. We used to be able to chuck up everything, and go off on our boat so nobody knew where we were—Jack loves the sea, or did, and I'm a good sailor. We sold that boat two years ago. We used to have an occasional week-end to ourselves at Doveridge; now we're alone only when Jack's catching up on sleep after one of his blasted conferences in New York or Chicago. He isn't really alive any more: that's what chasing after money and power has done for him. He's enslaved to bloody business.'

Such hostility astonished him. It was generated by something far more potent than the abstract loyalty of an anti-business intellectual to some pink or red faith. She was still in love with Jack. She could never fall out of love with him. Her casual affairs were mere aperitifs for what he alone could give her and had withheld for so long. He was always tired now; too absorbed with his ambitions to be jealous, even of Suns, if indeed he'd noticed enough to have cause for jealousy. That particular infidelity had repaired her intellectual self-esteem, badly damaged by her initial repugnance of the dark, animal strangeness of Suns; but she couldn't bring herself to tell Jack about it.

'I thought he'd be jealous of you,' she continued.

He was startled.

'You've never told him about me, have you?' he demanded.

'No. Would it matter if I had?'

'Like hell it would.'

'Why?'

'It would have interfered with business—can't you see that?'

'I'd forgotten that you and Jack worship the same grubby little gods. So it would have interfered with business. You sacrifice everything to that, don't you? You're like Smiles'

Self-Help: always punctual, always at work, no booze, hardly ever smoke, only let yourself go with one thing, and I don't believe you really enjoy that.'

He was silent, and she remembered what Janet had said to her the last time she'd seen Suns at Doveridge. 'Sometimes I feel as if I've helped to make a monster.' Laura had protested. 'You aren't responsible for what he's turned into,' she'd said; 'and anyway somebody else would have started him off. It was just his luck that through you he met Jack. He *is* lucky, you know.' Now she wondered if he was so lucky. His face was sullen; she'd hurt him. Good. About time he was hurt. He'd woven too many strands of ruthlessness into his character and the pattern wasn't pleasant. After a long pause, he said:

'Laura—you say you've lost Jack. Does that mean you've finished with him? That you don't care about him any more?'

She looked at him in surprise. He sounded as humble and diffident as the nervous, troubled young stowaway she'd taken charge of at Avonmouth six years ago.

'Why do you want to know?' she asked.

'Would *I* do, instead?'

She put out her hand and caressed his arm.

'Suns, dear—I believe you *are* human after all.'

'But would I?'

'I'd only have to be three years older and a bit precocious to have been your mother.' She laughed.

'Does that matter?'

'What about business?'

'I've thought that over: it needn't really interfere, and in a way it would demonstrate what *Jet* stands for, and what I want to see happening—just the sort of top-level example. . . .' He broke off. She had risen from her chair. 'What's the matter?' he asked.

'Stand up,' she ordered.

He scrambled to his feet, then staggered back as she hit him twice in the face—a left and right with clenched fists. He tripped over the chair, and fell flat on his back.

He got up slowly, wiping some blood from his face with the back of his hand.

‘What did I say wrong?’ he asked.

‘If you don’t know, it’s not much use my explaining.’

‘But I *want* to know. I don’t want to make the same mistake twice.’

‘Suns—be honest with me. You’re not in love with me, are you?’

‘No—I couldn’t lie to you about that. No, Laura—I’m not in love with you. But—you’re special, and, well, we could get along. I’ve never been in love with anybody——’

‘Except yourself.’

‘Maybe you’re right. But I’ve never wanted to go on with the same woman: I do with you.’ He hesitated, then added: ‘I’ve never been hit by a white before: I’ve always ducked out of trouble when I saw it coming.’

‘You’d better go and wash that blood off,’ she suggested; ‘it’s spotting your shirt.’

TWO

Both knew that the last barriers between them were down as they sat after dinner in the cool of the evening, watching the night-life glitter of Jamesport grow brighter as the sky darkened. Suddenly the glow of the city paled, as floodlighting was switched on round the new hospital, picking out the crystal and white towers and masses of Laura's design. They talked little, but felt companionable. Laura, aware of the meaning of long silences, had no regrets for her spontaneous violence, while Suns knew well enough that far more than anger had driven her fists into his face. He was disturbed, because he was uncertain; no longer sure of himself, and puzzled, too, because no other woman had roused so many conflicting emotions. He might well be in love with her. He felt drowsy; too tired to attempt to sort out what he felt about this white woman. Even a young man can be submerged in the backwash of fatigue that follows a thirteen-hour flight, and after an exceptionally long silence, Laura saw that he had dropped off to sleep. 'If I have him, I won't let him be destroyed,' she promised herself; then remembered that she'd made a similar vow about Jack. Poor Jack. He wasn't there any more. She knew that her flash of fury with Suns had exploded all her customary loves and loyalties, and blown Jack right out of her life.

Poor Jack. For such a long time he had been no more than a shadowy figure in the background; his substance as a lover and a companion sucked from him by business as a vampire bat sucks blood.

She woke Suns by shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes; levered himself out of his chair, stretched and yawned hugely.

She remembered how her first sight of that gaping mouth and tongue had brought all her race prejudices shrieking to life. They had died over two years ago, ever since that evening in the maze at Doveridge.

'Come on, you old bumble bee,' she said, linking arms with him; 'you're going to sleep off your journey.' She took him to his bedroom.

At the breakfast table in the morning she wondered if the difference in their ages really mattered. Now it seemed unimportant: they were both young—at least *he* was young, and she felt equally young. No: the disparity didn't matter *now*, but in ten years, or fifteen, it might. She would be middle-aged then. Would he enjoy love-making with her when she was over fifty? He had surprised her by his initiative and ingenuity: she was used to men supplying the vigour while she provided the art; but he took charge of everything, her part was passive, a reversal of rôles that increased her voracity.

Over innumerable cups of coffee they had discussed Santossa, who was going to call in for a cocktail on his way to a reception at Government House, the last to be given by His Excellency, Sir Udimore Brede. Santossa would be giving the next one—as President. He was, Suns knew, a dyed-in-the-wool segregationalist; as implacably anti-white as the Black Moslems of America; believing that the world belonged to the Negro, hitherto excluded from rightful dominance as the master race, and that independence for the island was another step towards the black mastery of the world. All this was anathema to Suns, who was as contemptuous of the Black Moslems with their religious sanctions for mass stupidity as he was of the South African Dutch and their sour, un-Christian God who blessed apartheid. Racial exclusionists of any kind were idiot children, he asserted.

'Well, don't tell Daddy Mobo that,' Laura advised.

'What's he want to do—bump off all t' niggers?' whites?

'Oh, he wouldn't hurt a fly. It's just politics. You'll see when you meet him. He likes me.'

'Well, I've a use for him.'

'He might have a use for you. But don't be too sure.'

Suns spent the day with his staff in the office newly rented by *Jet* in the large bank building in King Street, and was back in Laura's house with Tommy Arthur by five.

Just before six a white Rolls-Royce saloon drove up, for the Prime Minister had a proper sense of what was due to him. Only a few days to go now before he could replace the registration plates with silver rectangles, displaying a black star in the centre. He was in full evening dress, the insignia of the C.B.E. suspended below an impeccable white tie, and a miniature of the Coronation medal sparkling on his left lapel.

Mobo Santossa—'Daddy' Mobo as he liked to be called—was tall, rangey, grey-headed and grey-bearded: though only fifty-eight and well-preserved, he appeared almost senile to Suns, and from the shortest of conversations it was obvious that no new idea—no ideas of any kind—had entered his head for a long time. His affable manner masked a wariness that peeped out whenever he heard a remark or a proposition that demanded thought. He was a slow thinker, though able to talk with earnest emptiness while the cogs of his mental machinery engaged and the wheels slowly revolved, stopping only when he arrived at a conclusion or, more often, a complete misunderstanding. He was deeply in love with his own very beautiful voice, and tried to make everything he said sound highly confidential, clutching and pawing one or other of his listener's arms as he spoke. Because of this habit and the sacred shape of his beard he was nicknamed 'Stroking Jesus'.

Laura knew that in a dumb, prejudiced sort of way he was trying to do his best, but was always being lured from common sense by the sound of his own words. Although she distrusted him, for he would never do anything he promised unless she

was there to see that he did, she couldn't help being fond of him. She called him Daddy; he called her Laura. He made himself at home directly he entered the house and had an old-fashioned cocktail in his hand.

'I must be careful,' he said as he downed half of it; 'can't insult H.E. by drinking too much before I get there.'

'You know perfectly well you've a head like reinforced concrete,' she insisted.

'Perhaps you're right.' He finished the drink, took another, and turned to Suns.

'An island boy, aren't you?'

'I was born here,' Suns answered.

'And got away as quickly as you could, huh?'

'There was nothing here then. There will be when you're running the show.'

Daddy Mobo nodded. 'That's right,' he said. 'We're going to have freedom, justice, and prosperity. Equality of opportunity. Jobs for everybody, without the whites shoving in everywhere and keeping us down.' He paused; knocked back his second old-fashioned, then added: 'I don't mean you, Laura. We want white folks like you, with brains—look how you and I put up that hospital together. That's got the best out of both of us.'

'Of course it has,' she agreed, and gave him another drink.

No good covering up the real reasons for the meeting. Suns decided: this wily old word-peddler knew that everybody who tried to see him wanted something, and Suns wanted to divert a lot of the first gush of money which would flow from the Treasury of the new republic, not only to *Jet*, but to other parts of the Jenks industrial empire. (Carnaby Jenks had put him on the board of two holding companies, the grocery chain, and one of the cosmetics firms, to broaden his experience. Carnaby could always use an inspired salesman, and had some long-distance plans for Suns, though the expansion and development

of Jet Publications would remain his chief concern.) Suns decided that the best way to rouse Daddy Mobo's interest and hold his attention was to drop out a few loaded, memorable phrases, which the Prime Minister could pick up, parrot-like, and reissue with Messianic authority when he became President.

'You'll never make the mistake of thinking that you're building for the future merely by wrecking the past,' he told him.

Santossa gasped at that. 'The past has to go,' he said.

'Yes, but as you said just now, wrecking it isn't the same thing as building something new, for the future.'

As Daddy Mobo hadn't said anything of the sort, Laura realized that this deliberate attribution of credit was part of Suns' technique. Andy, she remembered, had once said that Suns had no involuntary emotional blocks. He could say things like that with apparent sincerity; certainly with conviction. He wasn't imitating anybody now: there was nothing of Jack or Andy or Carnaby Jenks in this persuasive man, who in a respectful voice was pouring a lot of sense into a receptive demagogue.

He talked about a 'two-way traffic in prosperity', and the colonization of Britain and Europe by the islanders. 'I think of myself as a colonist in England,' he said. 'Not a colonial—that's quite different. I've settled in England: I've made money there: and lots of our people could do the same. You're a big statesman, Mr President—I mean Prime Minister——' They both laughed. 'You can't deny that you're not merely thinking in your own lifetime, but, as you've just remarked, you're looking fifty years ahead. To the time when our people will be running the Commonwealth. Perhaps from England; perhaps from our island republic.'

Daddy Mobo was nodding away like anything, storing up those plangent phrases for future use. Laura kept an eye on his glass, so it was never empty for long.

He was late for the reception at Government House.

Just before he left, Suns introduced Tommy Arthur, still as inconspicuous and unimpressive as he'd been when selling the coloured sisters in Notting Hill. Daddy Mobo shook hands with the fervour of seven old-fashioned: he would always be delighted to meet any friend of Mr Alpion's. 'Any time,' he said; 'any time you want. Any time. Any time.'

'He'll be interviewing you about your statement in *Jet*,' Suns mentioned casually.

'Any time, any time, any time. Good-bye, Laura. I'm late, and good architects are never late, and we're good architects, aren't we, Laura? Good-bye, good-bye. Mr Alpion, good-bye, too. And welcome back to the island.'

Flourishing his silk hat, he was helped into the white Rolls by the chauffeur. When he had been driven away, Suns looked at Tommy Arthur and asked a question with his eyebrows. Tommy winked.

'I've had two of 'em rolling,' he said; 'one by the window, and one behind that chair.'

'O.K. Play 'em back.'

Tommy produced two tape recorders, and they listened to everything that had passed from the moment Daddy Mobo said, 'I must be careful,' followed by the gulp of liquor intake, 'can't insult H.E. by drinking too much before I get there.'

Every word came back, true and clear. Particularly those spoken by Suns.

'Just a precautionary measure,' he explained to Laura. 'He'll use everything I said, alongside his usual hifalutin balls. Trust Stroking Jesus to take the lot as his own. I might like to remind him sometime where he got the sense from.'

'And to think he does it all on soft drinks!' said Tommy Arthur. 'Mr Sunley Alpion, sir, you'd be a smash hit in politics here. The good Lord alone knows what you'd be if you used hard liquor.'

'Suppose *you* use some,' Laura suggested. 'An old-fashioned any use to you?'

'Make it Scotch on the rocks, Miss Corbel.'

He drank it slowly, regarding Suns with a mixture of respect and amusement. After a second drink he said:

'You wouldn't happen to be Suns Alpy, before you were Sunley Alpion, would you?'

Suns laughed: 'You're a good news-hawk, Tommy,' he replied.

'Thought you might be. I've been talking to your sister Sophie.'

'So she's back home, is she.'

'I'll say, and she's in business. Got a swell joint, out in East Jamesport.'

'What kind of business?'

Tommy Arthur winked. 'One I know quite a bit about,' he said.

'What have you done about your family, Suns?' Laura wanted to know.

'Nothing yet,' he replied. He'd forgotten all about them; but then he'd been much too busy. He'd look up his parents tomorrow. He said so.

'Bring them here,' Laura invited.

'No.' He was firm about that. 'They'd rather see me at home.' Which was perfectly true. He wondered whether they were still living over the garage in Hannibal Street. Better look them all up. He could spare a day. He'd begin with Sophie: she'd know where everybody was. He asked Tommy Arthur for her address.

'And here's her 'phone number as well,' said Tommy, handing him a card. Scribbled on the back of it was:

'At home: noon to midnight.'

THREE

Independence Day celebrations began on a very hot June morning. The Union Jack fluttered down from the flagstaff above Government House. For the last time the garrison band played the National Anthem, while His Excellency, Sir Udimore Brede, his right hand at his white plumed helmet, stood to attention. Top hats were respectfully raised and held a few inches above thick, woolly hair, or polished black pates. The smell of warm dust, the spicy redolence of dark, sweating skins, and the peppery exhalations of tropical flowers from the nearby gardens, mingled in a pungent pattern. The white surface of Government House, freshly painted for the occasion, hurt the eyes.

Royalty was present: cool, beautiful, and gracious.

The islanders' dream was coming to life—peacefully and tidily.

The Governor hoped that everything would remain peaceful; and although preparations for self-government had been tidy enough, he doubted the ability of the men who had just taken over from him to keep anything tidy—even on paper.

'A happy people,' Royalty had said.

Yes, they were happy, and happiness and responsibility, in Sir Udimore's view, were incompatible. He doubted whether any member of the new government or the new Parliament, or one native islander in the huge crowd that filled the grounds to witness the birth of the new republic, realized the sobering, and even unnerving effect of responsibility and power. One certainly did; for Suns was there, a privileged spectator in an official enclosure, with his mother in her brightest of best

clothes on one side of him, and Laura in cool white on the other. But of course neither Sir Udimore Brede, nor the new High Commissioner, Lord Percy Burlungo, had ever heard of Suns, or *Jet*, or the empire of Carnaby Jenks, or anything much that went on outside the Foreign and Colonial Offices.

Lord Burlungo (pronounced Bijou) resembled an elderly mule, but had rather less intelligence. Amiable, vague, charmingly inconsequential, and utterly incompetent, he had been given a post where it was thought he could do no harm. He had to be shoved into something, as he was related to four members of the cabinet, though not to the Prime Minister. He looked well in his official uniform, glittering with unearned awards and routine campaign ribbons. The islanders thought he was a splendid figure; they liked tall men who carried themselves well and had lots of stars and orders. (Daddy Mobo's stock had risen when he'd collected a medal and an order.) There he stood at the salute; outwardly calm and imperturbable, but inwardly troubled, for he was wondering how the devil he was going to tell one nigger from another. Some were tall, some short, some medium, but their faces all looked alike. He had already dropped one resounding brick at the official opening of the Hospital, three days before, when he had assumed from her dark colouring that Laura was a native architect. The mistake had been corrected tartly by Angela Brede, who disliked Laura but disliked Lord Burlungo even more. She felt, quite unreasonably, that her husband should have been appointed High Commissioner to the republic, though she had enough sense to keep the opinion to herself.

'Miss Corbel happens to be the very gifted niece of one of my oldest friends,' she had informed him.

'Sly old devil, Udimore,' he'd thought; 'pulling strings to get a job here for the girl.'

He knew all about nepotism, though such things as architectural competitions were outside his experience. Women

architects were outside his experience, too, and so were women who shouted with laughter when they were taken for Negresses. He almost blushed for Laura. And when, later on in the proceedings, he'd seen her arm-in-arm with a buck nigger, he'd felt badly about it all—very badly indeed—though it soon passed out of his mind, as most things did. Today blacks and whites were mixed up together in the official enclosures for guests and distinguished visitors. He supposed there would be more of that sort of mixing now in the island; couldn't say he liked it; but he'd better get used to it. Part of the job.

The band played the last bars of the anthem. A moment of silence followed when the chatter of the crowd was hushed; then a new flag crept up the staff. The captain of the Governor's guard snapped out an order; the guard presented arms; and the band did their best with the anthem of the new Republic, which sounded like a mixture of 'The Red Flag' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers', hotted up by swing rhythms—a tune full of tipsy optimism and furtive melodies, inviting feet to shuffle and faces to grin, freighted with cheerfulness, and as devoid of dignity as a clown.

The new flag, caught by a rare puff of wind, streamed out, rippling the horizontal stripes of emerald and orange and making the eight-pointed black star in the centre quiver.

The anthem ended and the cheering began and went on and on, while top hats were tossed in the air and a rainbow cloud of scarves waved by thousands of women shimmered over the heads of the crowd. Ten minutes went by before the President, Mobo Santossa, was able to pour his sonorous platitudes into the microphone. (There were five microphones: only one was live: four were for style.)

Daddy Mobo had been dishing out instalments of that speech during the last two years. It was enriched now by Suns' contributions. Fine, rolling phrases; full of boss words.

'Historic moment—destiny of our people—freedom, justice,

prosperity—equality of opportunity—chances for the best brains, men's or women's, black or white—keep the best we have—impossible to build for the future merely by wrecking the past—membership of the Commonwealth compatible with the power derived from independence—a two-way traffic in prosperity—give and take between Britain and ourselves. . . .’

(‘What the devil *is* the fellow driving at?’ Lord Burlungo wondered. ‘Somebody’s been putting some sense into him,’ Sir Udmore thought.)

The seductive voice went on and on:

‘—more than a new nation—the spearhead of a great race—we also will colonize—the achievements that will follow freedom—justice, opportunity, prosperity—liberty and equality—we must look further than our own short lifetimes—fifty years ahead—the call of destiny. . . .’

He was sorry to finish, but knew to a second how long he could hold that crowd.

‘Look then at our flag,’ he concluded, ‘which symbolizes the bright beauty of our rich and lovely land, this jewel set in the Caribbean, and at the dark star which tells the world that here, right here in this island of ours, a new power has arisen that stands for liberty, equality, prosperity, peace, and good will to all men.’

Suns knew the whole story of the flag, which the President had tactfully edited in his inaugural address. Tommy Arthur had dug out the details for him.

Long before a date had been agreed for Independence Day, the island Parliament had appointed a committee to produce a design under the chairmanship of Mobo Santossa. As Suns had once told Laura, the Prime Minister was chairman of everything in sight. He called it ‘keeping in touch’.

Everybody on the committee had agreed that red, white, and blue must be excluded. Those colours were tainted with English and French colonialism, and the Americans, systematically

plundered but unloved by the islanders, had them too. 'Freedom, justice, and prosperity must wave from our flag,' said the Chairman; and when the applause died away the committee got down to work. After four inconclusive meetings and an output of some twenty million words, they were still unanimous that freedom, justice, and prosperity must wave from the flag, and had parked the problem of symbolizing those abstractions on the students of the Jamesport Art School. When the time came to judge the results, the committee had a hundred and forty-two members, as every township and village on the island had clamoured to be represented. Every member turned up for meetings. Expenses were paid.

The art students did their best for freedom, justice, and prosperity. They produced heraldic compositions of broken chains, scales, *synges*, and piles of gold coins: the figure of Justice had been scrapped early on, for somehow or other a Negress holding the scales and sword didn't look like Justice, and a black skin was obligatory. The committee rejected all the complex muddles that were put before them, and asked for stars—either a green star on a yellow ground or a gold star on a green ground—or a constellation of little stars of assorted colours (but not red, white, or blue). Mobo Santossa made up their minds for them. He had known what *he* wanted from the beginning, but made no suggestions until the committee was reduced to a mood of despairing indecision. Even then he was careful not to dictate. He made it all seem like a flash of inspiration. He was flatteringly eloquent and persuasive.

'If we have a star,' he said, 'it must announce that something new, something promising, and something powerful has arisen in the Caribbean, so what can be better than a black star? Would that not stand for freedom, justice, prosperity, and power?'

And now that flag flapped above Government House, and in his inaugural speech the President had incorporated a few of the things he had said to the design committee.

At last the ceremonies of handing over and taking over were ended. The crowds drifted about the grounds of Government House (now renamed the Executive Mansion), and presently Royalty departed in the presidential car, from which the registration plates had been removed, but owing to decentralization of responsibility, nothing had yet replaced them. Daddy Mobo, though temporarily furious at that insult to his dignity, soon forgot about it as he sat by the side of Royalty and listened to the continuous cheering as they drove to the airport.

Sir Udimore and Lady Brede had left Government House the day before; moving in as guests of the High Commissioner until the next ship took them home. They drove back from the airport with Lord Burlungo to snatch a few hours of rest before attending the President's first reception that evening, when they would be visitors in their former home. Lord Burlungo, always ready with the wrong words, said:

'Been here twelve years, haven't you, Brede?'

'Yes.'

'Good show. Bet you'll be glad to get back to a civilized country.'

FOUR

Suns and Laura had both been invited to the first Presidential reception, and when the morning ceremonies were over they drove into Jamesport, and dropped Suns' mother at the garage in Hannibal Street. His father was out on an all-day hire job, so Laura was disappointed as she wanted to meet him. 'I must know all your family, Suns,' she said, as she steered the big Rover through the hot, crowded streets.

'You will—you will,' he promised.

'Any of them like you?'

'No. If they were, they wouldn't be here.'

They got on to the by-pass at last, and climbed through the hills to her cool, secluded house. A letter awaited her, with American stamps and a New York post-mark. She read it, and after a long pause said:

'Suns—you said it was a pity Jack couldn't come along with you. Well, he'll be on his way here—soon.'

'Why's he coming?'

'Because the bottom's dropped out of the poor 'ruling's world: he's lost out with those dedicated bastards in New York.'

'What is all this, Laura?'

'I'm telling you. His only hope of being made president of the R-U International show was for T.G. to appoint him before he packed it in. You were right when you told Jack years ago that T.G. would cling on till he died on his feet, and that's just what he's done. Jack's got about as much chance of stepping into his shoes as I have of sleeping with the Pope.'

Suns put his hands on her shoulders and looked down at her.

There was a tremor in his voice when he asked: 'What's this going to do to us?'

Laura had never dithered about anything in her life, and Jack's letter had crystallized the decision she'd already made about Suns. She couldn't renovate something that had been in ruins for so long; with Suns she could build something new: it would last ten years, at least. But instead of answering his question she asked one herself.

'How much do you care, Suns?'

'I'd throw everything away for you, Laura.'

'You wouldn't, you know. You might hide a few things you thought I didn't like, but you wouldn't ditch your career for any woman: now be honest. Would you?'

'Listen, Laura. After you sloshed me I did a play-back to myself—of everything I'd said to you and thought about you, and when I said I wasn't in love with you it was just because I didn't know.' He smiled. 'I didn't recognize the symptoms, Laura—just dumb ignorance on my part.' The grip of his hands tightened a little. 'I never want to let you go—never want another woman. And I can't lie to you—I've told you that before, and I have had another woman, here on the island, the morning I went to see my sister Sophie to find out about my family and where they all were. I knew then that nobody but you would ever mean anything.'

'Did you, cold-bloodedly, have this other woman just to reassure yourself about that?'

'Not altogether—it was more for old time's sake than anything else.' He stopped. 'You'll hate this,' he went on, speaking slowly, 'but it was Julie. She's one of Sophie's call-girls. Sophie's a call-girl too, and runs a service——'

Laura interrupted him. 'Wait a minute,' she said; 'before you go on, I want to know more about Julie. Why's she living that sort of a life?'

'Because it pays, and she likes it. When I went away she quit

on the idea of marrying anybody; she was getting hungry for what I gave her, so she said to herself "Why not sell it?"

'Did she tell you all this?'

'Yes—did you think I was making it up?'

'No—but you told me once that you were very much in love with Julie. And you were, then; it came out in your voice that first evening you stayed at Doveridge. I suppose I formed a picture of her which isn't a bit like the sort of hot iceberg you've just described. That's a bit mixed, but you know what I mean.'

'When I was young I guess I was easily satisfied.'

Laura laughed. 'When you were young indeed—what d'you think you are now? Senile?'

Suns was too serious to smile. 'When I was inexperienced—let's put it that way. I know better now: I know you.'

'Tell me more about Julie.'

'I didn't enjoy it—but she'd have been hurt if I hadn't.'

'Since when have you considered other people's feelings? Are you sure it was just to oblige Julie? Didn't you want to be certain that I hadn't pushed everybody else out?'

'But you have,' he assured her, wondering if she really guessed that he had wanted to compare their bodies. Julie was shorter by half a head, but they were built alike with generous breasts, small waists, and provocative haunches. Laura was looking at him, her brown eyes alight; no good trying to cover up with her. She saw through and into you.

'You still haven't told me much about Julie,' she said.

'There's nothing much to tell. She teamed up with Sophie three years ago, after Sophie came back here with enough cash to get a house of her own and set up a service.'

'But— isn't that sort of thing against the law?'

'Anything can be fixed, Laura, and my eldest brother's in the police. Tom's an inspector now, so it wasn't difficult.'

'But—for God's sake, Suns, you don't approve of this call-girl racket, do you?'

'This isn't England. It was the obvious thing for Sophie to do when she'd made some money in England. Who d'you think gave her the money?'

'How could I possibly know?'

'Carnaby Jenks.'

'Carbuncle? You mean when she was in England, she was his mistress?'

'One of the three or four he always keeps. Jack and Andy and I knew he liked Negresses—as a matter of fact I uncovered that—but there was no percentage in spreading it around.'

'And Sophie was one of them.'

'Yes. Until she happened to mention my name after she'd seen Jack on T.V. when we broke the news about *Jet*. I was mentioned; she asked Carnaby about his coloured partner, said she had a brother called Suns, and the next thing she knew she was on her way back to Jamesport with five hundred quid.'

'And you don't mind?'

'Why should I have any hard feelings? Carnaby Jenks wasn't the first. And he treated her well. She was the only one of his coloured girls I knew nothing about, simply because she was in London. She liked him, and he was kind to her—after his fashion.'

'And you'll be able to go on in business with Carbuncle without this getting between you?'

'Why should it? If it hadn't been him, it would have been some other man, who might have given her a raw deal instead of looking after her. She's been lucky. You just write her off as a tart, don't you?'

'I never write anybody off—unless they've sold something much more important than their bodies, like Jack has, and like you may. But I think something'll save you from going the way Jack's gone.'

'In spite of what you told me the other night? Remember? That I worship the same grubby gods, and don't drink, hardly

ever smoke, and am always on the job? Listen, Laura—we're not a disciplined lot. We take the easy way out, like Sophie, and until we learn the hard way, and get the sort of order into our lives that the white English have, we'll never do all the fine things that old fools like Daddy Mobo seem to think we can do by talking about them. Do you know what my mother said, when I offered to buy the Jamesport branch of Fernand's car-hire business for my father, and send my twin brothers, Colin and Angus, who play in the steel band up there at the Blue Candle, to Europe to study music, and then stake them so they could run a band of their own; and put some money behind Jimmy, who's a waiter, so he could start a restaurant—d'you know what she said? "I hope you've done nothing wrong to get all this money." And she cried, and wouldn't believe for a long time that I hadn't been in some criminal racket. That's the way too many of us think—and that's the way too many of us act when we get to England. Easy money—that's what most of us are after. I've had to fight like hell and grind out all the idle, feckless whims that most of us fall for. I learnt a lot from Jack, a little from Andy, and more from Carnaby Jenks than anybody. But don't think it's been easy. I've made myself hard and used what I've got; and I want to see more of our people doing just that.'

Laura slid her arms round his waist and brought him closer to her. 'Suns, dear Suns,' she said; 'you never told me that you were doing all this for your parents and brothers.'

'Why should I?'

'Your mother's a pet. I want to meet Sophie and those brothers. And I thought you'd forgotten all about your family. You never wrote to them, did you? Why not?'

'Better to tell them. And I knew I should come back for a week or two some time—especially after we got going with *Jet*.'

'I'm beginning to think that I don't know very much about you,' she confessed.

'No you don't; and we've a lot to discover about each other, I guess. Now take Sophie—you may say you don't write people off, but they sink down a bit in your estimation if you hear something about them that jolts you. That's true, isn't it?'

'I wouldn't mind sinking down a bit on that settee.'

He picked her up, carried her across to it, and when they were settled side by side, said:

'You've just filed Sophie away in your mind as a tart, haven't you?'

'Well, isn't she?'

'Yes, but—in the top flight. It's a business like any other. Only the white English try to hide from each other what all men and women want and must have. Once we're mixed in with you, you'll have a happier way of looking at life. We're realists about sex; and we all knew what Sophie was like long before she left home. We just accepted it as one of those things; it's her line, and why should we worry because she's made good?'

'Some people would say she's made bad.'

'That's the white in you talking.'

'But I *am* white.'

'There's some of our blood in you a long way back,' he said.

'No white woman takes to our way of making love, as you take to it.'

She didn't argue with him, and presently they were too pre-occupied to talk at all. They forgot about everything: Jack and Julie and time too, before they fell asleep.

They had to dress in a hurry, and were nearly late for the Presidential reception.

FIVE

President Santossa knew when to unbend and dispense with dignity; but seldom gave advance warning to his staff of an impending switch-over to informality, so they never knew whether they were dealing with His Excellency, the President of the Republic, or good old plain Daddy Mobo; and his Social Secretary, Mr Peter Ontoso, despite a long apprenticeship in that office when Santossa was Prime Minister, was usually twitching with nervous tension, dreading the disaster that somehow or other never happened. Santossa, like crowned heads, reception clerks at luxury hotels, head waiters at famous restaurants, public relations officers, and a few people in the Foreign Office and the State Department, possessed the gift, sedulously cultivated, of remembering names and fitting them to the right faces, and that should have simplified the Social Secretary's task of keeping the presentations smooth and honouring protocol; but everything depended on whether the President decided to play the part according to the script. As the guests assembled on the ground floor, he was supposed to appear at the head of the staircase which ascended from the hall, so he could receive them after their names were announced by the ex-Governor's butler, prompted by whispered information from Mr Ontoso. The scene should be impressive, with the emerald, orange, and black of the Republic's flag filling the background with patriotic lustre. One side of the landing was given over entirely to the press. Every facility had been provided for reporters, radio and television commentators, photographers, and movie cameramen. The enclosure was cluttered with appliances, spotlights, cameras, tall tripods, and microphones. The N.B.C. and the B.B.C. had shown out their most

experienced men to cover the event. Members of the press would be allowed to circulate freely so they could talk to anybody. At all costs they must be kept happy.

Mr Ontoso had worked throughout the afternoon at the preparations, his condition of agonized apprehension growing worse as the demoralized condition of the staff became increasingly obvious. When they ceased to be servants at Government House and became servants at the Executive Mansion, their new and glorious independence was celebrated by successive glasses of the island's straw-coloured rum, insidious enough in a rum collins or a planter's punch, but incendiary stuff when poured on ice and tossed down cold and neat. Even the butler, normally a monument of decorum, was in the truculent stage of his own private social revolution, and informed Mr Ontoso between hiccups that he wasn't taking orders from any damned nigger, that he knew what should and should not be done at a reception, and what was good enough for Sir Udimore Brede, who was a very proper gentleman, should be good enough for old Daddy Mobo. 'We're as good as one another and better than the whites,' he concluded; and after that personal declaration of independence took charge of the arrangements. The Social Secretary was brushed aside—no new experience for him as he'd worked so long for Santossa—and found to his relief that though everything was done in the slowest of slow time, when evening came and the guests began to arrive, the arrangements, at least on the surface, seemed to be in perfect shape. The butler and most of the staff were passably sober: the former, in his place at the head of the stairs, white-coated and centrally ablaze with a cummerbund in the republic's colours, was ready to announce the guests when the signal was given for them to ascend. The ex-governor's band, kindly loaned for the occasion, occupied the minstrels' gallery at the opposite end of the hall, ready to play the national anthem when the President appeared. Mr Ontoso, faint with anxiety and famine—he had

eaten nothing since breakfast and not much then—popped in and out of the ante-room, from which the President was supposed to emerge. The hall below began to fill up. Major Sprakes, ex-A.D.C. to the ex-governor, always helpful, had volunteered to do some tactful shepherding down there, so the more important of the official guests would be in the right place for mounting the stairs when everything was ready. Mr Ontoso, almost tearfully grateful for his services, felt confident that nothing could go wrong downstairs. He felt confident about nothing else.

Time went by. The President didn't appear. Conversation shrilled, rumbled, and buzzed; the hall was almost full; then suddenly voices were hushed, applause broke out and was interrupted by the band striking up the National Anthem.

The President, deciding that he would be Daddy Mobo at his first reception, had suddenly appeared in the hall, popping out from one of the adjoining rooms, where he had been watching the guests through a door held open to give him a slit of vision, waiting for the right moment to make his entrance.

From the moment of his appearance the orderly plans of the Social Secretary sank in a flood of democratic jollity. Daddy Mobo, familiar, informal, and discursively affable, strolled about with all kinds of unauthorized people tagging along with him, including Tommy Arthur, who was making mental notes of everything. (A swell feature for *Jet*.)

For official guests, like the High Commissioner, the Bredes, and some of the island's more distinguished British and American tax-evaders, the experience was almost unnerving; but Laura and some visiting Labour Party M.P.s, who had flown over for Independence Day at the Republic's expense, found the occasion exhilarating.

Lord Burlungo, after having his right arm gently massaged by the President for nearly five minutes, while he listened to an output of earnest remarks almost as meaningless as his own,

began to think that he'd been let in for a much tougher job than his kindly relatives had led him to expect.

'Bit of a shambles, eh?' he observed to a small blonde woman with large deep blue eyes to whom the President had introduced him by saying that they were bound to know each other. Although Daddy Mobo always remembered names, he often forgot to mention them when he made introductions. The High Commissioner had a vague recollection of having seen her face before.

'Shambles?' she repeated.

'Yes—the show's a bit out of hand, don't you think?'

'They're so happy now that they're free at last,' she replied frigidly.

He looked at her incredulously. 'But they weren't slaves,' he protested, wondering who on earth this attractive little creature could be.

'Practically slaves, under colonialism.'

'Oh, come now—er——' The sentence hung, and she smiled and said:

'Doris Quickley—member for Fittleborough South. Not your party, Lord Bijou.'

'No,' he assented, 'no—indeed.' Damn that nigger President, introducing him to this dedicated trouble-making do-gooder. She was always on the move, in Africa or the West Indies, making inflammatory speeches about the tyranny of colonialism, and then leaving harassed administrators to pick up the pieces after she'd returned to Westminster and misreported everything.

'You don't approve of me, do you?'

'Very much indeed, now I've met you,' he said, treating her to a toothy smile.

She looked at him without replying. He found the gaze of those dark blue eyes rather disturbing. Presently she said: 'What do you suppose you've been sent here for?'

He knew the official answer to that and gave it at once, but she shook her head. 'That's the press hand-out; I want to know what you think.'

'My dear lady, my office only became effective at eleven o'clock this morning——' He looked round in despair, saw Laura nearby and caught her eye. She was talking to two tall Negroes, one in evening dress, the other in a dark blue uniform, so alike that they might have been brothers. They were. Laura piloted them over and introduced them as Inspector Alpy, of the Police, and Mr Sunley Alpion, of the magazine *Jet*. Doris Quickley dropped the High Commissioner, rolled her blue eyes at Suns, and annexed him. Inspector Tom Alpy mentioned that he was in charge of security arrangements, and Lord Burlungo said: 'Splendid.'

'I have to move around all the time, my Lord,' he apologized, 'so if you'll pardon me——'

'Of course.'

'But you're not attempting to educate them politically,' Miss Quickley was saying to Suns; 'you're just evading your responsibility.'

'What are you and your party doing, if it comes to that?' he demanded; 'you're far more interested in coloured people out here and in the new African states and in South Africa than you are in those at home.'

'I suppose you'll be putting up other buildings on the island,' said Lord Burlungo to Laura.

'Well, Daddy Mobo did say something about a lot of new schools, but I told him to get another competition going through the R.I.B.A., like he did for the hospital.'

'Daddy Mobo?'

'The President. He'd love it if you called him that. He's rather a dear, and I'd never have got that hospital finished if he hadn't pushed from behind whenever I asked him to.'

'I see.' He didn't. He hadn't really understood any of this.

'Rotted by the profit motive, just like the rest of the press,' Miss Quickley's voice had an edge that sliced through the conversations that were going on all round her. Only the tight-packing of the crowd and the band, playing selections from *My Fair Lady*, prevented her from making a speech. (She would, later, she decided.)

Mr Ontoso had come downstairs and was pushing his way through the mob of guests to give the President some unpleasant information.

While the reception was in full swing, a colossal beano was getting under way in every part of the island. Laughing and cheering people had gradually filled the streets of Jamesport. Those good-humoured crowds were drunk with enthusiasm: nothing else was available. Daddy Mobo had fixed that. He knew his people. Half-drunk when sober, dangerous when tight. Every bar and liquor store in the island had been closed for Independence Day.

After nightfall the velvet sky was ripped into shreds and tatters by fireworks. Bonfires were lit in open spaces, and left untended when the crowds, dancing round them, were attracted by bigger and better bonfires elsewhere. Everyone was letting off fireworks, anywhere and anyhow; rockets hissed through the air, sometimes horizontally, landing on roofs, bursting through windows, and presently starting a fire in Jamesport's big tourist draw, the Straw Market. The flames spread to the wooden shacks and slum dwellings between the Market and the dock area and the huge blaze got out of control. As the streets were impassable, the fire brigade couldn't get through to cope with it. The crowds as well as the fire got out of control, and a movement began—nobody knew who started it—to march to the Executive Mansion and cheer the President and liven up his reception.

Some minutes passed before Daddy Mobo would listen to what his Social Secretary was trying to tell him in agitated

whispers, but when he did Tommy Arthur also heard what was said, looked around, spotted Suns, and shoved his way towards him. 'Give a line to Daddy, quick,' he said, after he'd relayed the news, 'he's panicking. If he makes a speech it'll sweeten it all up—I'll get lights fixed on the balcony: get him up there.'

The President had been told that the grounds of the Executive Mansion were full of people, the police at the gates had been brushed aside, and the gardens, carefully planted and tended by Lady Brede for so many years, were already trampled into juicy pulp.

Daddy Mobo's face had crumpled into a frightened mask; he plucked at his grey beard with a quivering hand; standing as if he'd taken root, apparently unable to move or think. Suns, without ceremony, grasped the arm of Mr Ontoso. 'We're going upstairs,' he said; 'get the staircase clear.' And to Santossa: 'Mr President—this is the moment for the greatest orator in the Commonwealth to tell his people about the new Golden Age. Speak to them from the balcony over the porch. We're having lights fixed up there. They'll want to hear about all the new business that will come to the island and really give it a new age of gold.'

He had the President by the arm now; they were at the foot of the stairs, and as they went up together Suns had another idea, large, vulgar, appealing and irresistible to a man like this panic-stricken politician. 'If you aren't careful somebody will start calling this the White House,' he said, 'especially as you're calling it the Executive Mansion. Why not change its colour: paint it gold, Mr President, to be the symbol of the new golden age you've just been telling me about.'

They were on the landing. The balcony ran in front of the tall french windows of the ante-room.

'A new golden age,' Santossa was murmuring half to himself; 'the Gold House. Fifty years of planned prosperity. All gold.' He had a transitory vision of himself in a gold laced uniform, all

the palace police in gold—what was that? Careful now—careful. Not too fast. Santossa hitched his mind back: his ambitions were running away with him. Executive Mansion, or Gold House—not *palace*. Not yet. Later, maybe. But now—liberty equality, justice, the golden age of prosperity. The words sang melodiously; phrases seethed and bubbled within him, stirring all his latent power of belief in the paradise to come. He was coming to the boil.

Spotlights on the balcony. The President stepped into a white glare.

So far all his speeches had been delivered from platforms, just a little above the level of the audience, enough for him to see over their heads without being able to look down at their upturned faces. Now, for the first time, he could speak down to people. He envisaged the showy dictators of the recent past, bawling from balconies, and making commanding gestures from an impressive altitude.

Flashbulbs fizzed and glared, movie cameras began to roll, the phallic shapes of microphones were thrust forward to catch the magic words as the President came forward to the balustrade and bowed. The crowd roared. He raised his right hand for silence and didn't get it, remaining, arm outstretched like a petrified Nazi storm-trooper. The cheering continued until at last he raised his left arm as well, and then, for some inexplicable reason, the crowd fell silent.

They loved the bit about the golden age.

SIX

Dawn was breaking before Laura and Suns, Tommy Arthur and Tot Pacey were able to leave the Executive Mansion, pick their way through the ruined grounds, and find their car—one of the few undamaged cars in the official park. They took along with them the dishevelled member for Fittleborough South, still almost hysterical from her experience of getting in touch with a liberated people. She had gone into the grounds shortly after the President's speech was over, had tried to address the crowd, who wouldn't listen to a white woman just then, was playfully hustled and, a bit later on, nearly raped. She was not consoled when Inspector Alpy assured her that it couldn't have been a drunken assault as no drink had been available anywhere on the island—outside the Executive Mansion and private houses of course. The official car that had been put at the disposal of the V.I.P.s had been stolen (so had the High Commissioner's, the *Jet* office car, and twenty-three others); all the car park attendants and most of the drivers had gone off to see the fun and the fireworks; and Laura's Rover had been left alone simply because she'd driven it there herself and locked it after parking. So Miss Doris Quickley, M.P., left without transport and almost without clothes, was looked after by Laura, who took her home, gave her a sleeping tablet, and put her to bed.

'She'll be in the next Labour government,' said Suns thoughtfully, after Laura had brewed coffee and they all sat watching a column of smoke that rose above Jamesport, like a smudgy black finger pointing to the sky (Laura's servants had taken the night off, and none of them had yet returned.)

'She's a silly bitch,' said Tot Pacey. 'I got some swell shots of her after she got away from the mob. Like a strip-tease act gone wrong. They should be worth something.'

'*Jet* can't touch 'em,' said Suns; 'American magazines might be interested. Contact some and see. Fleet Street is out: the left papers wouldn't use them, and the Tory press leans over backwards like the Government to bolster up the new states.'

Tommy Arthur suggested some unscrupulous exceptions, but Suns shook his head.

'We'll sell American rights only,' he said. 'By the way, Laura, this girl could be useful to you.'

Suns in a calculating mood jarred on her.

'That wasn't why I brought her here,' she told him rather sharply.

'I think I'll pop down to Jamesport and see if I can get any pictures,' said Tot, 'the roads ought to be open by now.'

'I'll come along too,' said Tommy Arthur; 'there's something pretty sticky going on there, otherwise they wouldn't have shooed us off.'

When they'd tried to drive on to the Jamesport by-pass after leaving the Executive Mansion, they found their way barred by road blocks manned by traffic cops. They had to turn back inland and approach Laura's house from the hill road.

'Take my car,' said Suns; 'and phone in a report from the office. I wonder where Tilly's got to.'

'Why not have a rest first,' suggested Laura.

'The press never sleeps,' said Tot. 'We're on our way.'

They left.

'Tired, Suns?' she asked when they were alone.

'No—worried. Daddy Mobo's going to make a balls-up here, and put back everything we're trying to do in England. He's no good, Laura, but I've got to make the whole thing sound fine and dandy in *Jet* if I'm to get the contracts Jenks wants.'

'But surely the rest of the press won't hide anything.'

'Won't it! I told the old fool to leak the news that he's proposing to send a special commissioner to England with a couple of million quid to spend with British industry.'

'He can't be so hopeless if he's got the sense to do that.'

'Whose idea d'you think that was?'

'Yours, I suppose. It sounds like you.'

'No—it was Carnaby Jenks. I merely relayed it.'

He yawned; so did Laura.

'We're fools not to go to bed,' she said.

The telephone woke them just before noon. Suns answered it.

'Man, was that a night to remember!' said Tommy Arthur's voice. 'About a fifth of Jamesport in ashes; over three thousand people homeless; eighteen dead, and the Lord knows how many injured. But it's been officially denied that there was any violence. Tilly's got pictures of the lot—she was down here, on the job all night, and she turned them in an hour ago. They're swell.'

Suns came to a decision.

'Use everything—all that Tot took last night as well. We're going to dress it up as the story of what really happened. I want a dummy made up of the feature article, with paste-ups of the illustrations, with captions, and I want it in my hands by tomorrow.'

Tommy Arthur whistled. 'O.K. chief. If you want it that way—but will you publish it?'

'I want it here to show to the President.'

'You'll have it,' Tommy Arthur promised.

Suns replaced the instrument on the bed table and turned to Laura with a grin.

'That solves everything,' he said.

'How?'

'Daddy Mobo will sign any contract to stop that version being published,' he said.

'Suns, that's blackmail.'

'It's business.'

'It's damned dirty business.'

She got out of bed. He put out a hand to detain her. She struck it. 'Don't touch me,' she cried. The savage disgust in her voice startled him. He jumped up, and stood, facing her.

'What's got into you, Laura?'

'Get out of my bedroom.'

'But I don't understand.'

'Your mother was damn right when she thought you'd made your money in a criminal racket. You have.'

'That's nonsense—I've never done anything illegal.'

'You probably never will—but you'll never do anything worth doing either.'

His consternation was almost pathetic. How dangerous could a woman get? he wondered. She was quite capable of telling Santossa all about it. With her uncanny ability to read his thoughts, she said: 'And if you believe that you're going to get away with this, you won't! I'll see that Daddy Mobo isn't robbed by you and the Carbuncle.'

The bedroom door opened and a small blonde, untidy wreck tottered in. She was wrapped in a green dressing gown of Laura's, far too large for her. She tripped over it, sat down abruptly on the bed, and seemed unaware that she was looking at two stark naked people. Her bleary blue eyes were incapable of focusing on anything. The member for Fittleborough South had only one immediate and urgent need. 'I can't find the bathroom,' she croaked.

'This way,' said Laura.

Suns picked up the telephone and called Tommy Arthur. He'd have to sell the goods to Daddy Mobo the hard way now: that would take longer. But he could sell anything. Hadn't the theme song of his success story been, *Sell the Goods*,

Brother! from that terrifying moment when he explained himself to Captain Morgan on the *Wenvoe* till now?

'Cancel that dummy,' he said to Tommy when he got through.

That ought to square things with Laura, he thought.

But he was mistaken.

SEVEN

The post arrived late at Doveridge on that Friday morning in mid-December. The mail van had just managed to climb the steep hill from Chipping Campden; snow had fallen heavily, and the roads, partly cleared, were irregularly veneered with ice. Laura had a nightmare drive down from Liverpool the previous evening, arriving to find Jack reading comfortably in bed. After his coronary he worked a four-day week, frequently took a week off, and cut down his commitments. He resigned from the board of Jet Publications; and, taking advantage of that prudent escape clause in the contract with Researchers-United Inc, detached the British Company, so that it became once more a separate entity, paying its way and keeping its profits.

‘Ah,’ said Andy Mulgrove with enormous relief when they were on their own again, ‘merge, submerge, emerge. Farewell, a long farewell, to dedication!’

When Laura came into his bedroom she looked exhausted.

‘Get Dis to bring a tray up here for you and be matey,’ he suggested.

‘I’m too damn tired to eat.’

‘You’re overdoing it, my girl. Have a drink at least.’

‘I’ve had a triple Scotch, and now I’m going to bed.’ She left him, for since his illness they slept in separate bedrooms.

He didn’t like her listless air. Too much on her plate.

But she was up and about early on Friday morning, crunching over the snow-covered garden, admiring the white cornice that topped the yew walls of the maze and sparkled in the thin

winter sunlight. She felt worth double in that keen, frosty air.

They had a late breakfast, and after the post came, she tossed over one of her letters to him. He read it, then said quietly, 'This has been your big year. You damn well deserve this. And for once in a way the initials don't stand for "Other bugger's efforts!" The citation really means something. "For services to architecture." And have they been services! Take a peek at your list: the training college at Oxford, the social centre at Mansonbridge, the new wing of that Liverpool hospital, and those housing developments in Hampshire. Three of them won in competitions, like the Jamesport hospital. That was your best yet, and I suppose it was the job that really did the trick.'

Indirectly it was, for Laura's inclusion in the forthcoming New Year's Honours List, followed some conversation between Lord Burlungo and one of his accommodating relatives. The High Commissioner had come to London in September to attend one of those minor conferences that put the mutual animosity of new Commonwealth states on a firmer footing. He lunched with the Minister after it was all over, and heard much to his astonishment that Sir Udimore Brede seemed to be quite broken up by his retirement. The Minister pointed out that he was too old for further employment, but they felt they would like to do something for him. Not easy, as he had already collected all the routine awards.

'Tell you what, Pobs,' said Lord Burlungo, struggling to get an idea into shape, and vividly remembering that dark woman he'd taken for a Negress; 'he's got a niece or something, or his wife has, who's built that hospital place at Jamesport.'

The Minister—Pobs to his friends—a genial and patient man was familiar with his cousin's mentality. He encouraged him with an urbane smile, and waited.

'Get it in a minute—yes, Corbel, that's the name. Laura Corbel. A woman architect, I suppose. Done a good job. Winds that old windbag Santossa round her little finger. Got nice hands, too,' he added.

The Minister made a note of the name. Something should, perhaps, be spared for architecture; anyway, he'd put it forward. He liked old Brede. They didn't turn out chaps like that today.

So Laura's O.B.E. was really due to Angela Brede's dislike of Lord Burlungo, which had established in that vague nobleman's mind a mythical relationship. He remembered that the word niece had been mentioned, but nothing more.

'Aren't you feeling on top of the world?' Jack asked, for she was silent, and looked rather glum.

'No. It's like being offered champagne by a teetotaler. These half-witted public men who dish out the honours know nothing about architecture. They're not ever aware of buildings—old, new, good, bad, or bloody. They don't see anything. Somebody said the other day that they were visually illiterate, and they are.'

'Well, *I'm* feeling on top of the world.'

She smiled then.

'Dear Jack,' she said; 'd'you realize that you're always nagging at me to ease up with work like I used to nag at you?'

'But you *are* belting into things far too hard.'

'I always have; but you were away such a lot that you never really noticed how much I was doing or how often I was away myself on jobs. We haven't lived together properly for over two years; we haven't spent more than ten consecutive days together in all that time, till you came to the island and had that coronary. Thank the Lord you did have it—a much needed warning, darling. I suppose the tension of that time in New York after T.G. died and your gamble that didn't come off

just went on building up and up, till you were knocked out the day after you showed up at my place.'

Jack was silent for a long time. Then he lit a cigar. 'It's my first today,' he explained, rather defiantly; 'cigars are allowed. Don't look at me like that.' He drew on it, expelled the smoke, pushed back his chair and continued. 'You thought that when T.G. died I hadn't a chance to be President, didn't you?'

'Well, I assumed that's what happened when you wrote and told me that you weren't going to be President, and that he was dead.'

'I never told you that some time before he died he'd got majority agreement that I should succeed him.'

'And those bastards ratted on it?'

'No. They were prepared to honour the agreement, and even welcomed it. They wanted me. You're too ready to think ill of America and Americans, Laura. It's a common complaint in England. I could have run the whole international organization if I'd wanted to; but sitting there in that office on Madison with everybody expecting me to make a graceful speech of acceptance, I knew that I didn't want any part of it.'

He smoked awhile, without speaking, till she said: 'Go on. Why didn't you?'

'I realized that I should lose you if I did. It was as simple as that.'

'Why didn't you tell me that before?'

'I was going to. I wrote from New York to tell you I was coming to the island to stay. I didn't want to lose you. Then, the day after I arrived, I knew that I had. I looked through the sketch book that you'd rather carelessly left lying about in the bedroom. There were too many nude studies of that bloody nigger in it for me to have any illusions left.'

'And that touched off your coronary?'

'I suppose so.'

'The whole thing had ended a week before you turned up.'

'Have you seen him since?'

'No. Nor want to.'

Jack smiled. 'T.G. reckoned he was my most successful idea,' he said; 'perhaps he was. When they get over here and have the opportunity to use their brains, they're just like us—no better, no worse.'

'Is that all you have to say to me about it?'

'What else is there to say? If you hadn't been divorced and we'd been married in a church, I'd have told the world that I was taking you for better for worse, for richer for poorer. Whatever you do, I shall always want you.' She seemed so puzzled and perplexed that he laughed. 'Look, honey,' he said; 'a woman who isn't a bitch occasionally and hasn't a streak of the whore in her is a woman without any flavour.'

'I recognize my specification,' she said.

'Returning to Suns——' he began, when she stopped him.

'Need we?'

'I was only going to tell you that Andy told me he's going about a lot with that ghastly socialist woman M.P.—the one you met on the island. Doris Quickley.'

'I bet he is. She got her hooks into him the first time they met. As a matter of fact I introduced them at the Presidential reception. She was roughed up a bit by the crowd afterwards, and I took her back home to get over it. I think Suns saw a lot of her before she left the island.'

For the first time for months she wondered about Suns. He had flickered in and out of her life like a black flame—extinguished now, though never quite forgotten. A sort of monster. Aunt Janet had been right about him. But now Jack was back for keeps. She came over to him, kissed his bald forehead, and said:

'I wonder you don't beat hell out of me.'

So far as Suns was concerned, Laura was a write off. He'd found another woman with a mind almost as good as his own.

She was helping him to write the first paragraphs of a new chapter of the success story, entitled *Politics, or the Way In*. ('Go into them yourself, if you like, but keep them out of *Jet*,' said Carnaby Jenks, 'we're not for sale to any party.')

The new chapter was far more promising than the last, which had ended with a question he couldn't answer: *what* had gone wrong?